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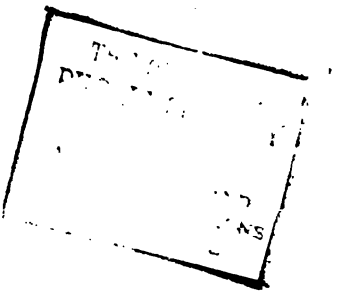

I WANT THAT RUSHED. HOW MUCH WILL IT BE?

Check Number 2134

BY

EDWARD S. ELLIS

AUTHOR OF

"PERILS OF THE JUNGLE," "ON THE TRAIL OF GERONIMO,"
"THE WHITE MUSTANG," ETC.

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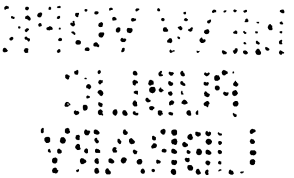


CHECK 2134.

CHAPTER I.

"ALL ABOARD!"

It was certainly a strange coincidence that on the first run made by Arthur Helmuth, in place of the regular express agent and baggage master, in the employ of the H. & N. C. Railway Company, he should have become involved in a series of incidents, which for a time mystified not only himself, but every one appealed to for aid in solving the singular events. It came about in this wise:

It was about a year subsequent to the incidents narrated in the story bearing his name, that he was at his post of duty in the baggage car, as the Express was making ready to steam out from the station at New Center, on its run of seventy miles westward to Hurvan, the terminus of the line.

There was the usual bustle of preparation, seen when a popular train on a well patronized road is making ready to start. There were the method-

ical travelers, who are never late, but who make their way with a certain dignity to the station, buy their tickets and select their seats with a deliberation, which shows their first thoughts are of their own comfort. There was the merchant, too, laboring under the delusion that every moment is invaluable to him, who defers his departure from his office to the last instant, and then, leaping into the waiting carriage, is driven like Jehu to the station, springing to the ground before the vehicle has fairly stopped, and, with great coat over one arm, dashes headlong into the waiting room, flings down his money for his ticket, frantically snatches up the change, dives through the throng around him, and leaps upon one of the platforms just as the train is moving off.

And there, too, was the passenger who is always a minute behind time. He could be seen some distance up the street, his broad face beaming like a moon and dripping with moisture, as he ran heavily forward, mopping his forehead and excitedly waving his hand for the train to hold on a minute longer.

And there were other passengers, such as are so familiar to all our readers, that we need not refer further to them.

It was only a few minutes before starting time, and Arthur Helmuth and Ezekiel Browne, the regular baggage master, were as busy as bees, accepting the trunks and parcels, checking them

off and disposing them in place within the car devoted to that purpose. The young man's strength, activity and quick perception were so helpful to the elder employee that he wondered how he had been able to get along without him. He had mastered the details of one of the most trying and responsible positions on the railway, and showed no disposition to shirk any duty. In fact, he always sought to lighten the labors of Browne, who, despite his temperate habits and correct life, was beginning to feel the effect of his years.

Several passengers, finding time at their disposal, stood just far enough to one side to be out of the way, and the work was almost finished, when Browne's little girl Bessie hurried out upon the platform and handed her father a note.

He recognized his wife's handwriting and hastily opened it.

"Arthur," said he the next moment, as his face turned pale, "my boy Dick has met with an accident, and I must go home at once."

"Is it serious, Mr. Browne?" asked the youth, sympathetically.

"I'm afraid so, though my wife doesn't say how bad it is."

He looked down at his little girl and was about to question her, when she burst into tears.

"Don't wait," Arthur hastened to say; "off with you, and I will attend to business. I hope it is not as bad as you think."

"Thank you, Arthur; you are always kind."

And without waiting to change his working clothes, Browne stepped out of the car, caught the hand of his little girl and hurried homeward.

"Is it too late to check my trunk?"

The question was asked by a well-dressed young man, who dashed up, holding one end of a small trunk by the handle.

"You are just in time," replied Arthur, "but there isn't a minute to spare; let me see your ticket."

The young man, who had dark hair, eyes, mustache and side whiskers, showed the slip of pasteboard, which proved that he had paid for a ride over the line to Beavertown. The baggage master attached to the station nipped it with his punch, slipped the bit of leather through the check which was thus secured to one of the handles of the trunk, and passed the corresponding brass check to the owner, who, expressing his thanks for the accommodation, ran back to the rear car, and seated himself in the train.

Almost immediately the engine steamed out of the station and started on its westward run.

Now, just such scenes as I have described may be witnessed many times each day in hundreds of sections of the country, and are accepted as a matter of course, but it was the last incident which has a bearing upon the events that follow.

CHAPTER II.

CHECK 2134.

ARTHUR HELMUTH, as I have intimated, had become so familiar with his routine of duty that he felt himself master of the situation, and was able to face the work without apprehension that its demands would perplex him in the slightest degree. In fact, he was more concerned about Ezekiel Browne's little boy than anything else, and regretted not having asked the father to telegraph him the condition of the lad to some point up the road.

The run from New Center to Jayville, the first stopping place, was ten miles. Here, the instant the train came to a halt, the baggage master at the station slipped one end of the smooth plank through the door, which Arthur Helmuth slid to one side, and three trunks shot down the slippery surface, as if taking a toboggan slide, while two others were shoved up the same inclined plane.

During the brief halt, Arthur ran the few paces required to the telegraph office, and asked the operator to inquire the condition of Browne's boy.

The agent complied, and promised that the reply should be sent up the road to intercept Arthur at the first possible point.

There being nothing to engage the attention of the latter, after drawing out of the station, and finding everything in the car ship-shape, he seated himself on one of the trunks, with his back against the door communicating with the train.

"Everything is going smoothly," he reflected. "There are certain seasons when the travel is so heavy that it is hard work for one man to manage the business, but now it is only enough to keep a fellow moving, and even then he has a chance to sit down when he wants to—that's an odd-looking trunk!"

There were no pieces to put off at Three Bridges, fifteen miles away, though there were several small packages. The two trunks to be left at Beavertown five miles beyond, were drawn up near the side door, ready to be slid down the plank with the least possible delay. One was large, while the other was so small that, with the usual contents, it ought not to be much of a load for a single person to carry.

It was the smaller trunk which caused the remark of Arthur as he viewed the array before him. It was painted a lead brown color and ribbed with tough wooden slats and iron bands. The latter were black and the former were not painted. The corners of the trunk and ends of the slats were protected by heavy pieces of iron.

These points merely proved that the trunk was of great strength and calculated to withstand the rough usage which all such articles are doomed to undergo on the railway. That which caused Arthur's exclamation was the fact that the scores of nails, which must have numbered several hundred, and appeared everywhere, instead of being the common kind, were gilt-headed. The effect was peculiar—the trunk appearing as if tipped in innumerable places with gold.

The young man was sufficiently expert in metals to recognize that they were not brass, as probably most people supposed who observed them.

"That's a queer fancy," he thought. "I suppose some cranky dude has taken a notion to ornament his property in that fashion for the sake of being peculiar. From its many labels, it looks as if it had done a good deal of traveling—helloa!"

With his back against the door, he felt it pushed forward, as though some one was trying to force it open. It was always kept locked, and no one not an employee of the road had the right to enter the express and baggage car. The pressure may have been strong, but under the circumstances the yield was slight, though easily recognized by the young man.

No one had unlocked the door, else it would have been pushed open several inches before reaching the trunk on which Arthur was sitting, since that was not resting directly against it.

The instant he noticed the effort he rose quickly and turned about to ascertain who was there. The upper half of the door contained glass, through which he could see the car behind him.

Whoever the individual was who sought to enter, he was content with one effort, for quick as was Arthur, he was only in time to see him as he stepped across the platform and entered the smoker. He did not look around, so Arthur was unable to see his face, but he was satisfied he was the owner of the trunk with the gilt headed nails. He saw his figure moving along the aisle until near the other end of the car, when he dropped into a seat behind so many passengers that he could no longer be identified.

"I suppose he is anxious about his trunk," concluded Arthur, resuming his place; "but he ought to know that we don't allow strangers in the express car—at any rate while we are on the road. The train robbers have too easy a time of it as it is."

Night was closing in. The lamps in the passenger cars had been burning some time, and Arthur now lit the one that was suspended from the middle of the roof as well as the other, which was so arranged that it could be slid over one arm, after the fashion of the conductors' lamps. Not expecting any immediate call for this, he set it on a large trunk at his left, and quietly awaited the arrival at Three Bridges, which they were now rapidly approaching.

The gleam of the lamps added to the brightness of the yellow headed nails of the smaller trunk and, despite all he could do, Arthur found himself speculating as to its contents and history.

His interest, however, was not deep, and as he felt the train braking up for the station, he drew aside the door and stood ready for whatever duty awaited him. He was disappointed when, in answer to his inquiry, he found no telegram from his superior awaiting him. But Beavertown was only five miles away, and he was confident of hearing something from Browne at that point.

The engine steamed along in the gathering darkness, arriving at the town near Arthur's home on time. A number of passengers left at this point, while others boarded the train. The transfer of baggage was quickly completed, and the youth stepped upon the platform and hurried to the little office where the telegraphist was busy with his clicking instruments.

A message was just coming in as he entered, and the operator handed it to him. Arthur read:

Little Dick is badly hurt—run over by a wagon —afraid he cannot live till morning. BROWNE.

Arthur sighed and walked slowly along the platform. He saw Engineer Ledwith hammering at the wedges of the parallel bar on the side next the station, as though something was out of order.

The youth observed the baggage master connected with the station and several employees looking on. A slight breakdown had occurred, but inquiry showed that it was likely to be repaired in a few minutes. Feeling in no mood for conversation, he passed on to his car.

Before he could enter it a young man hurried toward him.

"I would like to get my trunk," said he, showing his check. Arthur looked at it and found that it called for the small one with gilt-headed nails which had excited his curiosity while in transit. It was the duty of the station baggage master to attend to the surender, but as he was some distance off, Arthur took the check, removed the one looped fast in the handle of the trunk and said:

"There it is; help yourself."

"Thanks," replied the other, seizing the luggage by one handle and moving through the gate with it as if the weight was insignificant.

"He looks like the man who had it checked at New Center, and yet I am not sure he is the same," reflected Arthur, walking to the engine, where he handed both checks to the station baggage master, with an explanation of what had just taken place. The official expressed his acknowledgment of the favor.

Arthur paused a moment, and then, seeing tha the repairs were completed, hurried back to the express car, and entered it just as the bell rang and the train resumed its journey.

The next stopping place was Durmore, twelve miles to the west of Beavertown; but, before reaching that station, the young man received a disagreeable shock. He had resumed his seat on the trunk, in front of the rear door, his position being the same as that described before. He was depressed, because of his sympathy for the afflicted Browne, and was thinking of nothing else, when, as his head touched the knob, he felt it turned in a way which showed that some one had moved it from the other side.

Determined to learn the meaning of this, Arthur again sprang up, inserted the key, unfastened the lock and drew the door inward.

"What do you want?" he demanded of the individual who stood before him. Then, to his surprise, he recognized him as the man who had the small trunk checked at New Center. Disregarding the rules of the company, he stepped back so as to allow him to enter.

It was the same person beyond question. He was well dressed, with dark mustache, eyes and side whiskers, and though smiling, his face wore an anxious expression.

The closing of the door shut out the noise of the train, so that the two could converse without difficulty.

"You tried to enter this car, contrary to the rules, the other side of Beavertown," said Arthur, sternly.

"I beg your pardon," replied the other, courteously, "but this is my first attempt, and I would not have presumed now had I known it was contrary to your regulations."

"There has been no special harm done, and, since you are here, let me know your wishes."

"Why, apologizing again for my intrusion, I have made an awkward mistake; I fell asleep in the car and was carried beyond my destination, which was Beavertown."

"That isn't pleasant, but you can get off at the next station and take the eastern bound train without much delay."

"The conductor was kind enough to explain that to me, but what about my trunk?"

"I put that off at Beavertown."

"Thanks—then all I have to do is to show my check."

"Why, my dear sir, your trunk was claimed and taken away before the train left the station."

The stranger opened his eyes and then smiled.

"That cannot be, for I still have the check which calls for it."

And he drew the little square of brass from his pocket.

It was of the ordinary pattern, with which every reader is familiar, and contained the following stamped below the slit through which the piece of leather was intended to be inserted:

"I don't understand this," said Arthur; "are you certain this is the check you received at New Center?"

"Certainly; there could be no mistake about it."

"And I am equally certain I surrendered the trunk to the claimant who held the right check at Beavertown. The mistake is beyond my comprehension."

CHAPTER III.

A TELEGRAM AND ITS REPLY.

"WHAT is your name?" asked Arthur, looking sharply at the stranger who stood before him.

The man hesitated, perhaps because of his excitement over the strange blunder, but answered:

"Hugh Barnes."

"Have you a twin brother?"

"What is the warrant for *that* question?"

"Because the man who presented the check and took away the trunk looked almost as much like you as you do yourself."

"But it is self evident he could not have been I; please explain the circumstances."

"The baggage master at the station happened to be a short distance off at the moment the individual presented his check. I accepted it, compared it with the one I removed from the trunk, saw it was correct, and he took the baggage away. I handed the two to our agent immediately after, the claimant meanwhile passing through the gate, carrying the trunk by one handle."

"Well, sir, you have made an error which will

cost the company a round sum to make right; that trunk was mine, with the valuable property which it contained, and I hold the proof of the ownership. It will be well for you, next time, to use your eyes to better advantage."

Arthur winced under this reproof, but, for a minute, said nothing. He feared he had made an inexcusable blunder, though he was never more certain at the time of anything than he was that the two checks corresponded. The presumption was warranted, however, that he had done the thing of which he was accused.

He could have bit his lips with vexation at the thought that the temporary absence of the station baggage master from his post at Beavertown had led him to usurp his duties, just long enough to make a slip that was likely to subject the company to a heavy expense and cost him his situation.

"I can only say," he added, after a brief pause, "that I regret the error as much as you do. I hope no loss will result from it——"

"If there is any virtue in law," interrupted Hugh Barnes, whose temper was rising, "the loss will not fall on *me;* it's a pretty pass, when a man traveling over a public road can be robbed in this fashion."

"I hope you will regain your property within a few hours; I will send a telegram to Beavertown from the next station, and have measures set on foot to recover the trunk. Repeating my regrets, I have only to remind you that that is the most I

can do. May I ask you the value of the missing property?"

"It is worth a good deal more than *you* can ever pay," was the crisp reply.

"I was not aware that I had offered to pay for it."

"And the cost will make a nice little hole in the earnings of the Hurvan and New Center Railway Company. When the proper time comes, the necessary proofs and affidavits will be ready."

Arthur retained master of his feelings. The reproof of the man cut him, but the belief that he deserved all that was said, restrained him from ordering him from the car, with the advice to wait thereafter till he reached his home or a hotel, before indulging in slumber.

He invited Mr. Barnes to seat himself on one of the trunks in the baggage car and the invitation was grimly accepted. The man carried a thin cane, with a carved head, which he proceeded to gnaw, as a person will do, when suffering vexation. Feeling he could say nothing more to comfort him, Arthur for a time held his peace.

"What is the number of your check?" he asked, as the whistle of the engine announced their approach to Durmore.

Hugh Barnes withdrew his wallet from his hip pocket, and extracted the metal slip from among the papers and bills. Glancing at it he replied:

"It is 2134," and then, as if he suspected young

Helmuth wished to secure possession of it, he promptly replaced it, and shoved the wallet back, his looks and manner saying as plainly as words:

"I know your game, young man, but you can't work it on me."

"Jim," called Arthur, before the train had fairly halted, addressing the agent, who was waiting to receive and put baggage aboard; "oblige me by looking after things a minute."

And, without further explanation, he ran to the telegraph office and sent the following message to the baggageman at Beavertown:

"Let me know at once the number of the two checks I handed you for the trunk, taken off at your station. A passenger now on board claims the baggage with check number 2134."

Although it was expected that the recipient of the message was within immediate reach, a minute or two must pass before he could be heard from. Hugh Barnes had followed Arthur into the telegraph office.

"Wait here," said the latter; "I will be back in a minute."

"Tom," he added, dashing to the engineer, who sat in his cab, looking out of the window, "can you hold on a bit until I get a message from Beavertown?"

The grim engineer took out his watch and examined it before replying.

"How long will it be?"

"Not more than a minute or two."

"I've got to wait four minutes and a quarter," said Ledwith, with his eyes on the face of his watch.

"How's that?"

"I'm that much ahead of time; I tell you old 76 is humming to-night; she's got on her traveling harness."

"Good!" exclaimed Arthur, running to the baggage car, to give his help there.

Two of the four trunks that were to be left had already slid down the plank, and the third was following, but it took a plunge sideways, and, landing on one corner, split open like a watermelon. Inasmuch, however, as that was the only one ruined on the run that evening, the percentage of damage was slight.

Arthur was in time to steer the fourth aright, after which those that were to go aboard were run into the car and flung into their places.

He glanced at his watch and saw that two minutes were yet remaining before the train could leave; for, as is well known, while the engineer has the right to steam into a station as much ahead of schedule time as he chooses, he must not depart a single second in advance of the prescribed minute.

Tom Ledwith was not the one to wait, unless in obedience to orders from his superiors, and, seated in his cab, smoking his brierwood, with his left hand

resting on the throttle, he was sure to give it the gentle twitch that would instantly start the engine and its heavy load westward the instant the signal came from the conductor.

Arthur Helmuth, naturally cool and collected, was so nervous that he could not remain quiet. He walked along the platform to where the conductor was exchanging jokes with the engineer, both glancing now and then at their watches, between which there was not a second's variation.

Firemen Morehead had shoveled several hundred pounds of coal into the flaming maw of 76, and, with his long-necked oil-can in hand, was engaged in lubricating the joints of the iron horse, who would grow rheumatic unless carefully doctored. He came round in front of the pilot, distributing the oleaginous fluid wherever needed with a prodigality which never would have been displayed had the good-natured young man been obliged to bear the expenses himself.

Ledwith had finished his leisurely inspection, which consisted mainly of applying his hand to those places most subjected to friction. None of them had become heated, and there were no hot journals with their pungent odor beneath the cars.

Arthur would have been thankful for a breakdown at this place, for it seemed to him he was never so anxious for anything as to receive the reply to the inquiry he had sent to Beavertown.

"How much longer have we to wait?" he asked, hurrying to the engine, where the conductor was leaning, watch in hand, during his confab with the veteran engineer. It was the former who glanced down at his time-piece and answered:

"Not quite one minute."

"You are making such good time with 76 to-night, Tom, can't you afford to hold on a minute or two longer? You can easily pick it up between here and Hurvan."

"What's the matter, Arty? Are you expecting a message from your best girl?"

"No," replied the youth, unable to appreciate the pleasantry; "but a serious mistake has been made, and I'm anxious to learn something about it."

"I'll hold on a bit if Sam has no objection," replied the engineer, looking inquiringly at the conductor.

"I don't like to do it," he said, "but we'll wait a couple of minutes for you, if that will be any help."

"Thank you," replied Arthur, turning toward the telegraph office, where Hugh Barnes stood with folded arms angrily smoking a cigar.

"We're behind time now," called the conductor, "so the best we can do is to give you a minute and a half more."

"That's all I ask," replied Arthur, who had already resigned himself to await the arrival at Hurvan, where they were not due for three quarters of an hour.

"I wouldn't do it for any one else," remarked the conductor to the engineer, "but young Helmuth is such an obliging fellow that it is hard to refuse—helloa! he's got it!"

The telegraph operator had leaped up from his seat and dashing to the door, held up a yellow piece of paper.

"Here you are, pardner."

Arthur snatched it from his hand and read:

No mistake has been made; both checks are numbered 2134; what's the matter with you?

ALTMAN.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ORDER FROM THE PRESIDENT.

"THERE!" exclaimed Arthur, handing the telegram to Hugh Barnes, "you see the mistake is not *mine*."

The man read the message, with a deliberation hardly warranted by the brief time at their disposal.

"It seems to be the practice of your company to deal in duplicate baggage checks," he remarked; "but I hardly think it will pay them in the long run."

"You must admit that I am not blamable."

"I don't admit any such thing."

"And it matters little to me whether you do or not; I leave it to you and the company."

The bell of the engine sounded at this moment, and Arthur ran a few paces and leaped through the door of the express car, leaving Hugh Barnes smoking his cigar and glaring at him, as though he still failed to grasp the situation. He made a motion as if to board the train, but, if such was his intention, he changed his mind, and retained his place on the platform.

The express had not yet gained full headway, when the east bound train rushed past, and began slowing up for the station. Consequently, Mr. Barnes was not required to wait long at Durmore.

The receipt of the reply to his telegram lifted a great load from the shoulders of Arthur Helmuth, but it could not remove the perplexity about the checks. It had been demonstrated that in addition to the two regular checks marked "2134," there was a third one in the possession of the owner of the small trunk with the gilt-headed nails.

It was evident from what had taken place that something was amiss. He remembered scrutinizing the piece of brass, handed him by Mr. Barnes, quite closely. Had there been anything unusual in its appearance, such as a newness of looks, or a variation in form of the letters or figures, he could not have failed to notice it, but it exactly resembled those he had been accustomed to handle ever since entering service on the road, and of which there were specimens at that moment suspended on the pegs, within the baggage car.

Since there was deception somewhere, it must soon come to light, and he had nothing to do but to wait. He could not but believe that the one presented to him at Beavertown, by the individual who claimed and carried away the trunk, had been tampered with so skillfully as to deceive the baggage agent there as well as himself.

If such were the fact, it would seem that Arthur could not be held responsible, but he was unable to free himself of a vague uneasiness which came to him immediately after leaving Durmore. President Ketcham had complimented him more than once for his wide awake brightness, and it annoyed him beyond measure to feel that he was involved in an incident, which, no matter how it should terminate, must reflect upon that very trait.

"His confidence in me will weaken, for I believe it will be proven that I am blamable, though I don't know of a person in my situation who would not have done just as I did."

The road to the westward of Beavertown extended through a wild, partially settled region, which, although abounding in natural resources, was but slightly developed. For several years the terminus of the line remained at Beavertown, but a double track now extended all the way from New Center to Hurvan.

It has been stated that the station of Durmore lay twelve miles westward of Beavertown. This was the only stopping place for the Express between the latter point and the terminus at Hurvan, but ten miles beyond Durmore was a flag station known by the name of Ardvale. It had been established for the convenience of the farmers of that section, who occasionally found use for the railway; but, to board the accommodation train, it was necessary for the agent to display the red light or flag,

while the Express never counted upon slackening its space between Durmore and Hurvan. Consequently, after parting with Mr. Hugh Barnes, Arthur Helmuth expected a straight run of twenty-eight miles.

He was therefore surprised when, a quarter of an hour out of Durmore, he noticed that the train was slackening up. At the same moment the whistle sounded. A railroad man can tell when in a train the instant the brakes are applied, no matter how gentle the pressure.

Arthur stepped to the side door and drew it back far enough to thrust his head out a few inches. Looking in advance he saw a red light, doubtless suspended above the small platform at Ardvale. He noticed, too, that there was a marked change in the weather. When they left New Center, early in the evening, the sky was clear and remained so a long time, but it was now clouded with a misty rain falling. This added to the loneliness of the ride through the dismal woods on either hand, in which for miles not a dwelling was encountered.

It proved, as he anticipated, that the red light was displayed by the solitary young man who officiated at Ardvale as ticket agent and telegraphist for the company.

"What's up?" called Tom Ledwith, leaning out of his cab, as it swept slowly by toward the further end of the platform.

"I've a message from President Ketcham."

The engineer had been hoping that he would not have to stop, and, though his train was moving slowly, he held it well in hand, ready to spring forward on the assurance that he was at liberty to do so; but catching the reply of the agent, he applied the brakes with such sudden rigidity that everything came to a standstill with a jolt that startled the passengers behind him.

Conductor, brakeman and baggage agent were leaning out to learn the cause of the first halt the Express had ever made at this insignificant station. The law of the road is that messages relating to the running of trains shall be delivered in duplicate to the engineer and conductor, in order to avoid mistakes.

"Let me have it," said the conductor, springing off the forward platform with his hand extended for the paper.

"It isn't for you."

"Whom, then?"

"Arthur Helmuth; and the president's orders are that it shall be handed to no one else."

The young man was on the platform as soon as the rest. Accepting the paper, he read it by the lantern which the conductor held for that purpose, the two standing so near to the engine that Tom Ledwith could have seen the lines over the shoulder of the wondering youth, who looked up with the exclamation:

"Well, if that doesn't beat the mischief! There seem to be queer goings on to-night."

And by way of explanation he handed the following message to the conductor:

"I have telegraphed to Hurvan for an officer to be at the station on the arrival of the Express to arrest the man who offered you check 2134. Communicate with conductor Shelby, who will give orders to the brakeman to maintain strict watch upon him that he does not give you the slip. He must be secured at all hazards; detain him if he attempts to leave the train; it is of the utmost importance." "PRENTISS KETCHAM."

"Here's a pretty mess," said Arthur; "the fellow isn't on our train, but is making for Beavertown, or some point eastward."

It was evident that President Ketcham had caught his cue from the telegram forwarded by Arthur Helmuth to Beavertown. He had sent his orders to the youth instead of the conductor, fearing the latter might not recognize the individual.

"Wire the president word that the nest is warm but the bird has flown," was the comment.

"We can do better than that," remarked Arthur, hurrying into the station, to get away from several of the passengers who were beginning to crowd around to learn the cause of the stir.

With the conductor at his elbow, the youth wrote out a message detailing what had taken place. There was no call to be sparing of words, since the

telegraph line belonged to the company. He therefore furnished President Ketcham with full particulars, expressing the opinion that the man who had given his name as Hugh Barnes was on his way to Beavertown, where he would be due in a few minutes.

Leaving the message in the hands of the nimble fingered agent, the employees immediately boarded the train, which resumed its run, with several minutes to be made up by Engineer Ledwith.

The last car had hardly swept by the station, when the agent dashed through the door upon the narrow platform and began conducting himself like a crazy person. He snatched down the red light, swung it over his head, and yelled with the utmost power of his lungs, in the furious effort to attract the attention of some of those on the cars.

But, as a rule, the duties of a train hand require him to look mainly to the front, and very little to the rear, and it so happened that no employee cast a lingering look at the little station, which they were glad to leave behind them. The Express wound its way into and through the dismal wood, without anyone on board dreaming of the startling discovery made just a moment before by the operator and ticket agent, and which he was eager to reveal to those drawing so swiftly away from him.

CHAPTER V.

A CALL AT ARDVALE STATION.

THERE are few professions or callings in life which do not appear just now to be overcrowded, though it cannot be denied that the old lawyer's assertion still holds good: "there is always room at the top."

The country seems to be suffering in these days from a surplus of telegraph operators. If any one doubts the assertion, let him advertise for several of the gentlemen, promising a moderate price for their services. There is no station, however remote, unhealthful or undesirable, to which numbers of the young men are not eager to go.

Adolphus Ashland was a slim, weak youth, a year younger than Arthur Helmuth. He learned telegraphy at a business college, where he became one of the most skillful of operators. His parents were in comfortable circumstances, but he preferred to paddle his own canoe, and, when he was chosen out of a dozen applicants to take charge of the miserable little station at Ardvale, he was delighted.

He had been located there a couple of months,

when the time came for him to take part in the incidents we have set out to describe. The nearest inhabited house was a farmer's, a mile back in the country. He generally had a visitor or two each day, but was obliged to stay where he was until Saturday night, when it was his privilege to board the Express and go to Hurvan till Monday.

Most persons would have become homesick and disgusted in a week's time and thrown up the situation, but Dolph was not that kind of a young man. Despite his weak, almost effeminate frame, he possessed undaunted courage, which now served him well. He was unquestionably plucky and was resolved to stick it out, if promotion were denied him, until he grew up with the country.

He had brought along a few books, and always kept a loaded revolver at command. He knew that bears and wolves were occasionally met in the vast stretch of forest which enclosed him on every hand. He intended to borrow a rifle, and hunt for some of the creatures, but, up to the present, had not been able to do so, and possessed only the smaller weapon, in the use of which he was very skillful.

Dolph slept soundly at nights, though that may have been due more to his giving up the abominable habit of smoking cigarettes than to the resinous balsam of the woods. He was well liked by those who came in contact with him, because of his pleasant disposition.

But, without dwelling too long on young Ashland's personal history, it may be said that, after receiving the long telegram which Arthur Helmuth wrote in his office, he sat down at his instrument, with the purpose of rushing it through to Beavertown, where he knew President Ketcham was waiting for word from the young baggage agent.

It required just five seconds for Dolph to make the astonishing discovery that the circuit was broken. It was impossible to send a word over the line extending eastward!

"Somebody has cut the wire!" he exclaimed, leaping from his chair and hurrying out doors to give the news to Arthur Helmuth and his friends, but, as has been shown, he was too late.

"Confound it!" he muttered, walking slowly back into his little office; "that's too bad; but there's no help for it." After a moment's reflection he smiled broadly.

"What good would it have done if I *had* been able to tell them? They couldn't help it any more than I; I wonder whether this has anything to do with Mr. Barnes."

By the light of the lamp overhead, he carefully read the long telegram in the handwriting of Arthur Helmuth.

"That fellow slings a good hand," was his characteristic comment; "if he practices say five or ten years he may equal me—almost. He tells

a yarn pretty well too; no doubt President Ketcham would be glad to get hold of it, but inasmuch as this is a continued story, he will have to wait for next week's issue, which isn't any reason why *I* shouldn't scoop in all its fine points.

"Yes, it's cleverly told," he added, after carefully reading the lines, "but there's a little more here than I can understand; I think some of the ingredients are missing—the problem, as it were, lacks a few factors. How would it do to get out a serial with the title, 'Double Barreled Trunk Checks; or, The Mystery of Check No. 2134,' or 'The Baggage Check and Its Double, or, How the Mischief Did it Happen?' I'll be hanged if I don't try something of the kind, with 'All Rights Reserved,' to shut off the crowd that will want to dramatize and put it on the stage. No, that reservoir is plugged."

The last exclamation referred to the test which he repeated, and which showed that the lines eastward were hermetically closed against business for an indefinite time to come.

"There's one good thing," added Ashland with a chuckle, "they can't send me any orders from Beavertown to go out and hunt for the break and repair it. Hold on!" he added, becoming sober; "the president may forward a message by New Orleans, or San Francisco, or by Atlantic cable—ah, good evening!"

The youth was sitting behind his board parti

tion, which divided his office into two equal compartments, the narrow counter being the only boundary line, when a stranger entered.

A person in the situation of Dolph Ashland was always glad to receive a visitor, no matter who he was, but when he cast eyes on this individual, he felt strong doubts whether he was the kind of man he desired for a guest. He was tall, stoop shouldered, with a stubby beard, and evil eye, and the word "villain" written by nature all over his face.

He was fairly well dressed, with a slouch hat, whose front was drawn so low that his gleaming eyes were almost hidden by the brim. Instinctively Dolph slipped his hand down in a natural manner, to make sure his revolver was at his hip. It was there.

In response to the young man's greeting the caller nodded his head, with some gruff words muttered so low that they were not understood. Then he stepped to the primitive desk and began writing on one of the telegraph blanks.

He labored hard for several minutes, but finished at last and handed the result to Dolph.

"I want that rushed; how much will it be?"

The message, which was of a commonplace character, was addressed to a party in New Center.

"I am sorry," said Ashland, "but it is impossible to forward it."

"How's that?" asked the visitor with a growl.

"The wires are not working between here and New Center."

"What's the matter with 'em?"

"I can't say further than that they have quit business; they were all right until a few minutes ago, when I tried to get a message through to Beavertown but it was no go."

"Do you s'pose the wires have been cut?"

"It looks that way, though it may have been an accident that has interrupted communication."

"How soon do you s'pose they'll be fixed?"

"To-morrow; the company can't afford to be cut off this way; they'll have linemen out at break of day, and it won't take long to locate the spot."

"You didn't find it out until you tried to get a message through to—where did you say?"

The operator was sitting with his feet on the table in front of him and his hands clasped behind his head. While talking, he keenly watched his visitor. He replied to his question by unclasping his hands and pointing eastward, with the words:

"Beavertown; President Ketcham was expecting it and must be disappointed."

"Can't you reach him by a circuit on t'other side of Hurvan?"

"I suppose so, but it will take considerable time to do that, because a good many connections must be made, and an understanding effected before work can be done. Probably the break to the eastward can be repaired before that is arranged."

"You couldn't get my message through to-night by Hurvan?"

"I wouldn't like to try it, for it would be sure to be hung up somewhere along the road, and there's no telling when it would reach its destination."

"I don't believe a word you say, but it's all right," growled the caller, as he slouched through the door upon the platform where the drizzling rain was still falling.

CHAPTER VI.

"CLICK, CLICK, CLICK."

DURING this peculiar conversation, Dolph Ashland was doing a big lot of thinking, and using his eyes with a skill that would have done credit to an expert detective. And there was a mighty lot of material for speculation and study on his part.

The first thing which occurred to the delicate looking youth, after turning about and taking his second look at the caller, was that he had seen him before, though, for the life of him, he could not remember the time and circumstances. The fact that he knew the fellow was a ruffian ought to have been of help in recollecting him, but it was not.

"I'll place him after a while," he said to himself, "and in the meantime, I'll accept him as a problem in Euclid calling for demonstration."

Dolph Ashland did some clever work that evening, for which few would have given him credit.

He was satisfied, in the first place, that this man, appearing as he did, was playing a part for an object.

He wished to learn whether the telegraph wire eastward was in working order; and, with that object in mind, handed the agent a few lines, addressed to a fictitious person in New Center and signed "John Smith."

No one could blame Dolph Ashland for entertaining doubts about the genuineness of *that* signature.

Having become convinced that the wires to the eastward had been cut, Dolph formed the conclusion that the man standing before him was the one who did it, or at least, was connected with the guilty parties. Doubting whether the means used was effective (since he could not but have known that distance is no consideration in telegraphy), his questions were framed with the purpose of learning whether the severance of the wires would really shut off all communication, even for a few hours, eastward.

Had the operator been unsuspicious of the caller, he would have told him that within a half hour or less of the discovery of the break, President Ketcham was sure to find the means of communicating with Hurvan, and, if necessary, would hold converse with Ashland himself at his lonely station in the woods.

For that reason the operator misled him into the belief that all communication eastward was closed until morning. He could give his full attention, therefore, to any mischief he had on foot, without fear of disturbance.

But Ashland not only succeeded in misleading the rogue, but he strove to draw him out. He referred to President Ketcham, mentioning the fact that he had an important telegram, awaiting transmission to him, with a view of seeing whether the caller felt any special interest in the fact.

He succeeded to the fullest extent. Not his words alone, but the alert manner of "John Smith," showed he was interested. As if unaware of what he was doing, the operator fingered the open dispatch on the desk beside his elevated feet, as a person would be apt to do when engaged in conversation.

He observed the curiosity of the fellow, who shifted about and glanced here and there in his efforts to obtain a sight of the paper, which Ashland took good care to prevent.

It was the man's disappointment at being continually baffled in this direction, which led to his exclamation, as he passed out on the platform. The operator was quick tempered, but he repressed the hot reply that came to his lips, and, without removing his rather shapely feet from the pine desk, reached over and extracted his brierwood pipe from the tin case of tobacco, in which it was resting, punched the bowl full of the stuff, fired a match by switching it along his thigh and began smoking.

"He's a bad fellow," he muttered, as he flipped the lucifer against the desk, and then flung it on the floor, where scores of other burnt matches lay;

"and if I hadn't my popgun in my pocket, I might feel uneasy, but all such scamps are cowards, and I would rather like a brush with him to stir things up. I'll do it this time!"

The last exclamation had no connection with the thoughts to which he had just given expression. It alluded to a tenpenny nail, driven in the board wall beyond his elevated boots, and near the top of the ceiling. Dolph's occupation at times, when he found nothing to do in this dismal place, was to see how many rings of smoke he could shoot over that nail.

He had hung up three at one time, four at another, and, only the night before, he would have suspended six over the target, but for the fact that just as the last two were on their way toward the goal, he was obliged to sneeze so suddenly that he was unable to turn his head in time, and the diminutive cyclone scattered the vapor in all directions.

He now threw his whole energy into the effort to get seven distinct rings over the nail—that being one of the ambitions of his life. The conditions were favorable. The atmosphere in the little office was a dead calm, the tobacco burned freely, and, without any difficulty he accumulated an enormous mouthful of smoke.

Then, removing the stem from between his teeth, he shaped his lips into the form of an O, drew back his tongue, and deftly expelled a portion of the

vapor. It shot forth, a perfect circle, with its periphery rapidly turning upon itself, and climbing toward the ceiling, it missed the nail by less than an inch.

But there was a procession of smoke rings sailing upward, and the second one went over the projection, whose black head seemed to shove its way directly through the center. Right behind it came another, and another, until five had perched themselves on the support. The sixth was of such gauzy texture that it fluttered off to one side, while the seventh, being still weaker, dissolved into thin air when half the distance was passed.

"That's pretty good for a starter—I'll fetch it next time." He began vigorously puffing at the pipe, until the tobacco was freely burning, when he threw back his head again.

"Now, Adolphus," he said, addressing himself, "show what you can do when you set your massive brain to it, prepare to go back and astonish the world by exploits that will make every one turn green with envy—helloa!"

"Click, click, click," went the key at his right. Hurvan was sharply calling him. Dolph's feet dropped to the floor, he wheeled about, and was all business at once. The reply was instantly made, and the operator in the office at the western terminus of the line opened the following conversation:

"We shall have communication with Beaver-

town in a few minutes—I know they are hard at it—but the wires to the north are choked with business. Have you learned anything about the cause of the break beyond you. "

"Nothing; except I suspect it was cut to prevent my sending Helmuth's message to President Ketcham."

"We received news here a little while ago that the two burglars sent up for robbing old Wonzell at Beavertown last year have broken out of prison."

"They seem to be in luck," was the airy response of Ashland. "When did they take their walk?"

"Some time last night, though it wasn't found out till this morning."

"I forget their names—can you give them to me?"

"They were French Dick and Shorty Wales. Dick is a tall, stoop-shouldered scamp with a bearded face, and the worst-looking expression I ever saw——"

"That's enough," broke in Dolph. "French Dick was in this office within the last twenty minutes."

At the mention of the name of the miscreant, Ashland remembered that he was in the court-room at the time the couple were sentenced to long terms in the penitentiary.

CHAPTER VII.

"WHAT?"

THE operator at the Hurvan end of the line must have been overcome for the moment by the news imparted to him, for it was not until Ashland had called him several times that he responded.

"You surprise me. What was his business in your place?"

"He asked me to send a dispatch to New Center, but I am quite sure it was only an artifice to learn whether the tampering with the wires had been successful."

"No doubt there will be a big reward offered for his capture. Can't you manage it?"

"If you'll run down here and help, perhaps we can throw him down on the floor and tie him; but I hardly feel equal to the task of doing it alone, as I'm afraid he might kick."

"Where's his pal, Shorty Wales?"

"Give it up, but I suspect he isn't far off."

"Can't you manage to detain him till the first train down in the morning?"

"I might lasso him and tie him to the corner

of the office, but the building is so small that he might be apt to walk off with it; besides, I haven't any rope for a lasso, and if I had, I am out of practice, and if I was in practice, French Dick wouldn't stand still long enough to be roped. No doubt the hangman will do that for him one of these days."

The Hurvan operator must have suspected that young Ashland was assuming a courage he did not feel, or, on the other hand, was an incorrigible wag. The former held his peace for a minute or two, before taking up the thread of the conversation again.

"Try strategy on the fellow, and we will send some officers down early in the morning."

"I'll see what can be done——here he comes again. Excuse me for a few minutes, and don't call until I first signal you."

It will be understood that this interesting exchange of thought was from the wire—that is to say, not a word was written on paper, as would have been the case had Dolph been receiving a message for some one else.

Nothing could have been stronger evidence of the coolness of this effeminate youth than the fact that, during the last few minutes of the conversation he was aware that the escaped convict, French Dick, was standing within five feet of him. He was not in the little office, but outside. A slight noise caused Dolph to glance at the window at his elbow; where the misty rain was pattering

against the panes, and, as he did so, he observed, just beyond, a pair of eyes, gleaming from under a slouch hat that was dripping moisture.

French Dick was leaning against the corner of the window, his head, shoulders and body visible down to his waist, with his gaze fixed upon the young man manipulating the electrical instrument.

The only emotion approaching that of alarm was caused by the question Dolph instantly asked himself: "Can he read by sound?"

If he could, he was certain of acquiring considerable information of interest to himself. But the operator dismissed the thought the next moment, convinced that the ranks of this country's telegraphists could not possibly include Mr. French Dick.

The latter discerned nothing in the manner of the youth to raise a suspicion that he had learned of his presence, and he remained glaring at him while the confab went on.

Just before its conclusion, Dolph looked up, and, as if he saw the fellow for the first time, beckoned him to come inside out of the rain. The burglar did not move for a few moments, and then, straightening up, slouched round to the front of the small structure. It was the sound of his footsteps which caused Dolph to forward the last message to his friend, eighteen miles away.

"How'd you know I was out there?" was the gruff question of the scamp, as he walked through

the door and seated himself on the short wooden bench.

"Why, I happened to look up and saw you," replied Dolph, elevating his feet once more on his desk, and clasping his hands behind his head, with his hat tipped low on his forehead, while he puffed leisurely at his brierwood; "there's no use of standing out there in the wet; if you choose, you can stretch out on that bench and stay all night; I haven't any better quarters to offer you, and I'll give you a bite of bread and meat and a cup of coffee in the morning. I have to do my own cooking, and I've seen better at Delmonico's."

French Dick made no reply to this kind offer, which, after all, was not so disinterested as it might seem. Dolph had not forgotten the hint from Hurvan about detaining the fellow until the arrival of the first down train in the morning. He was doing his best to hold him, and knew better than to display any anxiety over the matter.

"I'll stay awhile any way," he growled, drawing a pipe from some inner pocket and lighting it; "but I don't know about waiting till morning."

"You are welcome, but do as you please."

The youth knew the fellow was studying him closely, as if he suspected he was trying some trick. Dolph affected not to notice him, and, having given his invitation, continued smoking his pipe, as though there was nothing more to be said.

Ashland could not lose sight of one unwelcome

fact; this man unquestionably possessed a companion, for Shorty Wales had escaped with him, and might be within call at that moment. It was a rather extensive undertaking to handle one of them, but any person might well shrink from the contract of corraling a couple. However, there ought to be no cause for suspicion in Dolph's off-hand invitation to French Dick to spend the night in his office.

The operator resumed his effort to lasso the nail overhead with rings of smoke, and was wondering within himself whether it was advisable to offer any extra inducement to the fellow to remain with him until morning, when events took an unexpected turn.

The convict abruptly rose from his seat, and, leaning on the horizontal board forming the partition between the two parts of the office, glared at Dolph, and without removing the pipe from between his teeth, asked:

"Did you tell me you had a telegram for the president of this railroad and couldn't send it to Beavertown?"

"That's what I said," replied Dolph, without lowering his feet, unclasping his hands, or turning his head. He merely looked sideways at the fellow while speaking.

"But you was telegraphing to somebody a few minutes ago."

"You hit it the first time, partner."

"Who was the chap?"

"The operator at Hurvan and I were holding a little conversation."

"What was it about?"

"Nothing in particular."

"You weren't sending that message to the president?"

"He don't live in Hurvan."

"But you might get it to him by some roundabout route."

"If I could, I would have done so, but I told you awhile ago, there is no chance just now."

"That's what you said, but I don't believe it."

"It makes mighty little difference to me whether you believe it or not; I am not aware that it's any of your business anyway."

Dolph Ashland still sat with his feet on the desk and his hands clasped behind his head, but he was watching the miscreant as before as he leaned on the partition, almost close enough to reach out and seize him.

French Dick evidently was not expecting such a response, for his ugly face flamed crimson under his slouch hat.

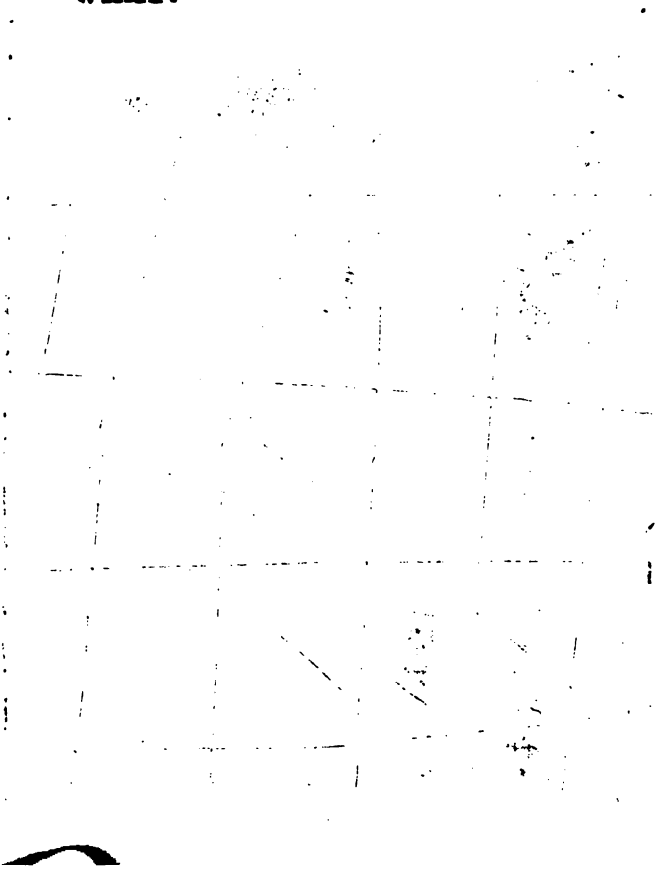
"Let me have that telegram for old Ketcham; I want to read it."

Dolph was surprised at last. His feet dropped on the floor, his chair came down on its front legs with a bang, his hands at the same moment fell at his side, and he wheeled about, with such sudden-

ness that his hat fell upon the desk at his side.

Looking straight into the repellent countenance glowering upon him, he returned the intense look for a moment as if speechless, and then, with a voice that could have been heard a hundred yards away, uttered the single word:

"WHAT!"



CHAPTER VIII.

AN INTERRUPTED TELEGRAM.

AT that moment, French Dick was the cooler of the two. Without moving a muscle and with both elbows resting on the partition, he said in his husky voice:

"You heerd what I said; I'll give you five seconds to produce the document."

In the most natural manner in the world, and without awakening the suspicion of the fellow, Dolph Ashland let his right hand fall upon his hip.

"All messages intrusted to our offices are secret, you can't see any except your own."

The young man had regained mastery of himself.

"Then I'll have to take it from you—that's all."

The broad board which served as a partition, was open beneath, so that a person had only to stoop to pass from one side of the office to the other. French Dick bent down, thrust his head and shoulders forward, and, was in the act of rising immediately beyond, when he found himself face to face with the muzzle of a loaded revolver,

almost close enough for the metal to touch his crimson nose.

Not only that, but at the instant of making the startling discovery, two chambers of the weapon were discharged. The first bullet nipped his left ear and the second his right.

"I could have killed you if I wanted to, and I'll do it at the next shot," said the operator, keeping the weapon leveled at the desperado; "out with you!"

The astounded scamp dropped on his hands and knees, in a panic of terror, and scrambled back in such haste that his hat fell from his head to the floor.

"Don't shoot! don't shoot!" he begged; "I was only in fun."

"So was I, but I'm in earnest now."

Dolph Ashland had risen to his feet, and was master of the situation. French Dick caught up his hat, and assumed the upright posture near the door, with his scared face turned toward the youth on the other side of the counter.

"What did you mean by that?" he demanded, regaining a part of his assurance.

"If you don't understand, I'll let you have another barrel," was the quiet reply of the young man.

"Put up your gun; I ain't going to hurt you."

"I don't think you are; you've got a pistol, and, if you want a row, draw and begin."

"You're the most peppery chap I ever seen," remarked the convict, edging to the door, and placing his hand at his hip, as if he wished to draw his weapon, but feared being anticipated.

"The instant you bring out your pistol," said Dolph, "I'll let fly, and it looks as if I had the drop on you, pard."

"So you have; I'll own up; let's call quits."

"Out of the office, then! If you show your face again, I'll riddle you like a sieve."

Being almost in the door by this time, French Dick whirled about, ducked his head, and darted out upon the platform, where, for the first time, he breathed freely.

He must have entertained a profound respect for the girlish-looking youth who had checkmated him in such a brilliant fashion. Had he expected anything of that nature, he would have taken care to make better preparation before stooping to enter the forbidden precincts of the humble telegraph office.

Dolph Ashland kept his erect posture, but lowered his weapon to his side, retaining his grasp, so that it could be raised the instant needed. He possessed no special strength, but it may be doubted whether any one could draw a weapon quicker than he, and there certainly was no one with a more marvelous accuracy of aim.

The drizzling rain made little patter outside, permitting him to hear the heavy tramp of his vis-

itor, as he walked along the platform, his hurrying footsteps showing that he had some fear of a bullet speeding after him.

The sounds grew fainter until they suddenly ceased. They stopped so abruptly, indeed, that it was evident the miscreant had stepped off the boards to the ground.

The operator's next step was to refill the two chambers of his revolver that had been discharged. He followed the hunter's law of immediately reloading after firing his gun.

His next proceeding was one of prudence. Raising the window on his right, he reached his hand out in the wet, drew the heavy shutter to and hooked it in place. There was a second window, opening from the other apartment, which was secured in the same manner. The telegraph office was built of heavy planking, impervious to pistol or rifle balls, and he now felt safe against any shot from without.

Nothing would have been easier than for French Dick to steal up in the darkness, and, halting beyond sight of any one within, send a bullet crashing through one of the window panes at the young man, powerless to protect himself.

Just behind him was his bunk. He was thus always within call of his instrument, which rarely disturbed him. The Westward bound express was the last passenger train to pass, but a freight train going in the same direction was due near midnight.

He was not expected to bestow any attention on that, and was generally in his bed when it rumbled past, shaking every plank of the station with its thunderous jar.

Dolph allowed the door to remain open, for his position enabled him to guard any approach from that direction. When it was time to retire, it was easy to bolt and secure it against intruders.

He now resumed his place at the instrument, and called up his friend Frank, at the other end of the line.

"We have been very anxious here," wired the latter, "fearing that something had befallen you."

"I'm all right," was the reassuring response.

"Did you receive the call?"

"I did, and it was rather interesting."

"Let us have the particulars."

"They are few: French Dick, after hanging round the window awhile, came in at my invitation, lit his pipe, and took a seat on the bench outside my desk. By and by he demanded to see the telegram Helmuth left for President Ketcham. I declined, whereupon he started to take it from me, but, on the way, ran against the muzzle of my pistol——"

"Did you shoot him?"

"Who's telling this story? If you want to try it, I'll shut off steam."

"Beg pardon—go ahead."

"I didn't shoot him, but gave him such a scare

that he backed out, and when I ordered him off he went as meekly as a lamb."

"Good for you! There are a half dozen in the office, and we all congratulate you; it's a pity you didn't wing him."

"I don't know but what it was a mistake, but I hate to do up a man in that style."

"You will be likely to have another call from him before morning."

"Very probable, but I am ready."

"We are anxious about the Express which you telegraphed left Ardvale on time; it is now a quarter of an hour overdue, with no signs of it."

"There seems to be a good deal of mischief going on along the road to-night, and I shouldn't be surprised to learn it had got into trouble."

"If the road was clear, the superintendent says he would send an engine to Ardvale for French Dick and Shorty Wales."

"I don't think it worth while, for Dick is the only one that has shown up, and he is so suspicious he would get out of the way before the officers would have a chance—helloa!"

"What's up?"

"French Dick has come back—Shorty Wales is with him—callme in ten minutes—but—the music will open—keep—sh!"——

The instrument in the Ardvale office ceased working at this point.

CHAPTER IX.

BESIEGED.

ENOUGH has been told about Adolph Ashland, the telegraph operator in charge of the lonely Ardvale station, to prove his pluck and readiness of resource. His coolness and quickness enabled him to get the better of the desperado, whose strength was triple his own, but it must not be supposed that he was foolish enough to discount his good fortune.

It is much more pleasant to relate how such a young gentleman outwitted a "bad man," and drove him from his presence, than it is to record his overthrow; nevertheless, the large majority of cases have the opposite conclusion, and, in the affairs of this world it is the powerful, evil person who most frequently gains the upper hand over the weaker, but more worthy one.

When Dolph detected the sound of footfalls on the platform of the station, he knew what it meant.

French Dick had brought his confederate, Shorty Wales, to his help, and they were coming to clean out the establishment.

Brave as was the youth, he knew that to keep

his seat was to invite his own discomfiture. He could count on giving as good as he received, but the others, by firing around the corners of the door, would gain an overwhelming advantage.

Without a moment's thought, therefore, he darted under the partition, pushed the door shut, locked it, and slipped the heavy bar in place. He was not a moment too soon, for before he could return to his chair, some one turned the knob and pushed against the obstruction.

It did not yield, and a man, whose voice showed him to be French Dick, hammered vigorously upon the structure.

"Helloa, in there!"

"What do you want?"

"Let us in."

"Can't do it," replied Dolph; "it's after business hours, and this hotel won't open until to-morrow morning."

French Dick was not such a zany as to imagine he could deceive the operator by affecting friendly intentions toward him. It was equally, clear that no threats would provide the *open sesame* to the station.

He heard the fellow muttering to his companion, but none of the words were distinguishable. The next moment it seemed as if a pile driver had struck the station. The kick against the door from a heavy boot shook the whole structure.

This was repeated several times, and though

things rocked, as if a vigorous young earthquake were well under way, no sensible impression was made on the door, and the men ceased their efforts for the time being.

The glow of the lamp overhead lit up the interior, and the operator maintained a close watch of the door for the first sign of yielding. It was his purpose, in case of a giving way, to fire the instant he saw anything to serve as a target. Had a foot broken through it would have been perforated before it was withdrawn. Indeed he was on the point of firing, but the prospect of driving the ball through the door was so remote, that he refrained.

"What extravagance in shoe leather!" he muttered, taking his seat on the bench occupied by French Dick a short time before; "he has ruined his boots more than a month's wear would have done; they must have friends somewhere in the neighborhood or they couldn't have exchanged their convict garbs so soon—*ah!*"

He heard cautious tampering with the shutter behind him. Finding the door so obdurate, the men were looking for weaker points. Fortunately the clumsy structure closed so smoothly that it was impossible to get any purchase upon it. They moved to the further shutter and repeated the attempt, but with no better success than in the first case.

Young Ashland now reached up to the swinging lamp and placed it on the board partition. In this

position he could extinguish it by a single whiff down the chimney.

He meant, in case the miscreants secured entrance, to blow out the light. In the utter darkness his chances would be equal, if not better, than theirs. His familiarity with his own office gave him great advantage in concealing himself while firing.

Several facts were apparent. If those two men were determined to force an entrance, they could not be kept out. No extended effort was required to batter in the door or a window. There were pieces of timber lying about the station which were available as battering rams, and thus applied were irresistible.

But while it was clear that the rogues were eager to enter, and while, too, they were evil enough to take human life, they were likely to hesitate a good while before doing so. As has been shown in another place, they were marked men, known far and wide to the officers of the law. Possibly they might elude recapture as matters stood, but if they committed murder, the hunt would become so hot that escape must be out of the question.

Dolph looked at the face of his watch. It was a quarter to eleven, and the Western freight was due at twenty minutes past midnight. He ought to have retired long before to be prepared for the duties of the following day, but few persons in his situation would find it easy to enjoy dreamless slumber.

There was a slig t cessation in the misty, drizzling rain which had already lasted several hours. The stillness was so profound that it was oppressive. The youth could trace the movements of the two rogues almost as readily as if they were in his field of vision. He heard the murmur of their voices at the outer window, followed by a soft, gliding sound, which showed that one of them was passing his hand over the moist shutter in a search for some projection or crevice that would give him a grip by which to open it.

A few minutes later one of them stepped to the door of the office where, in the same stealthy manner, he tried the knob. There was no doubt of this, since Dolph's eyes confirmed his hearing. He saw the knob move in response to the effort from the outside.

Again the men came together, and after a whispered conference, walked toward the lower end of the platform. It was not to be supposed they intended to leave, though, as the minutes passed without anything being heard of them, the operator deemed it possible they might have gone off, convinced that the job in hand was a failure.

It was galling to young Ashland to know that he was cooped up in this manner, by a couple of convicts, and more than once he was on the point of revolt. His inclination was strong to step quickly out on the platform, where all would be in the same relative situation, and invite the miscreants

to open whatever "proceedings" they might have in mind.

He could have telegraphed for help to Hurvan, for no tampering with the wires in that direction had been done, but he was too proud to ask for assistance. He sent word to Frank that his callers had been shut out, and he did not think there was cause to fear serious trouble from them. He then bade his friend good-night, saying he was about to lie down to sleep.

On the point of doing so, he recalled that he had forgotten to inquire about the Express. He did it now, and in answer to his question was told that nothing having been heard from the train, an engine had been dispatched to look for it.

Ashland was sure to awaken on the slightest call from the instrument and he lay down, determined to secure what sleep he could while the opportunity was at his disposal. He heard nothing more of his unwelcome visitors, and was inclined to think they had left.

He was in that condition when the senses, hovering on the borderland of unconsciousness, are more sensitive than if fully awake, when it gradually dawned upon him that there was a peculiar noise somewhere in his neighborhood.

Furthermore, the noise was continuous, though quite faint, and it was intended as a signal to him. Some one—evidently a friend—had been trying for an indefinite time to open communication with him.

CHAPTER X.

TELEGRAPHING BY SOUND.

ADOLPH ASHLAND might have paid no attention to the birdlike tapping which intruded itself into his consciousness, seeming for a time to be a part of the fancies of slumber, but for the fact that there was a method in the noises which showed they were meant to attract his notice.

Suddenly he raised his head on his elbow, with the discovery that the sounds were in accord with the telegraphic code. His expertness enabled him to recognize a distinct call to him. Somebody was tapping against the planking in a way which spelled the words:

"Helloa, in there! Helloa, in there!"

This had been repeated more times than he could guess, and was still going on with the steadiness of a piece of machinery.

The astonished operator slipped noiselessly from his bunk, and stood in the middle of the rear division of his office. The lamp was turned so low that the point of wick diffused only a dim illumination through the apartment.

"That is neither French Dick nor Shorty

Wales," was his conclusion, "for they know nothing of telegraphy. Where is the fellow, and who can he be?"

There could be no doubt of his friendliness, and Ashland set to work to locate him. Careful listening made known the surprising fact that the stranger, instead of being at one of the window shutters, as Dolph supposed at first, was under the platform. He had crept beneath the planking and was striking some sharp object against the lower side of the flooring, directly under the operator's bed. He might have made a louder noise, but evidently refrained through fear of attracting the attention of others.

The moment Ashland located the signal key, as it may be called, he stooped down and, with the point of his lead pencil, began tapping his response upon the floor.

"Helloa, who are you?"

The noises below ceased for a second or two, and he repeated his inquiry several times after which he paused for the reply.

"I am Ben Averill, sheriff of the county."

"What are you doing under the platform?"

"I have been trying to attract your attention for the past half hour."

"Why don't you come round to the door and let me admit you?"

"There are two men on the platform, waiting for a chance to get at you."

"Who are they?"

"French Dick and Shorty Wales. They escaped from the prison at Hurvan last night, and I want your help in capturing them."

"How is it you are alone instead of having a posse?"

"I hadn't time to get one. I was visiting my sister, who lives only a few miles from here, when I saw them pass along the road just at dusk. I knew them both, and didn't let them see me; there was no one that I could get to help me. I waited several hours for my brother-in law to come home, but he did not show up, and I was so afraid of losing the fellows that I started after them."

"How did you know where they went?"

"I supposed they were making for this station to board a freight train, as they were too late for the Express."

"Do they know you are after them?"

"No; they would have opened on me at once, and both have had a chance not only to swap their prison clothes, but to get pistols."

"How are you fixed?"

"I have but a single revolver; if I had a couple I would have sailed in long ago."

"If they fled from Hurvan, they would not be likely to board the freight and go back to the same place, would they?"

"Is there no train the other way?"

"Not until after the Express passes in the morning."

"I was mistaken, then."

"You must have been; for the freight does not stop here unless it is signaled, and runs by at such speed that they could not board it no matter how anxious they might be to do so."

"Very well; how are you heeled?"

"I have a Smith & Wesson. French Dick came in here alone and ordered me to give up a private dispatch, whereupon I drove him out at the point of my revolver. Soon after he came back with Wales and I fastened the door against them."

"It was lucky you did; I must have arrived shortly after. You know how dark it is, and it took me a good while before I could get the lay of the land. After a time, I found they were sitting on the bench by the door outside."

"Are they there now?"

"They are; they haven't said anything to each other for a long time, and may be dozing, but they will wake up quickly enough when you open the door."

"Do you think they will try to shoot me?"

"They are ugly enough to do so, but I don't believe they dare run the risk of the halter."

"How did you get the idea of telegraphing me?"

"I learned the busine s over a dozen years ago.

I knew of course that if I could make you hear me, you would catch on, and that's how it stands."

"I was asleep until you awoke me; but what plans have you?"

"If we can separate the two, I can manage them; but there is no use of my trying it alone so long as they are together."

Dolph now held a discussion with the officer as to the best method of overcoming the villains, who, sitting on the bench so near them, may have noticed the bird-like tapping. If so, neither could have formed a suspicion as to its significance.

The prospect was not encouraging for the capture of the couple. Had Ashland possessed the strength for a hand to hand encounter with one of them, he would have joined forces with the sheriff, but it would have been utter folly for him to make such an attempt.

Sheriff Averill was a brave and skillful man, but he possessed that no less valuable trait known as discretion. To that fact was due much of his success as an officer, for it saved him from making many a mistake that would have helped the criminals instead of the authorities.

He proposed that they should await the arrival of the freight, and secure the aid of the train hands, but the difficulties of that plan were insurmountable.

In the first place, the train would not stop unless signaled to do so, and Dolph could not display

the red light without placing himself at the mercy of the ruffians. Even if he could manage that, the couple were not such ninnies as to sit still at the station and allow themselves to be gathered in like runaway schoolboys.

Still further, admitting such stupidity on their part, the train hands were unarmed, and, no matter how courageous, were not likely to help in the capture of a couple of desperadoes, who would stop at no violence to save themselves.

"I have it," suddenly tapped Ashland; "I will open the door just far enough to let one inside and then close it before the other can follow; you will grapple with him at that instant."

"And what will *you* do?" was the prompt response.

"Depend on my pistol."

"It is a desperate chance, but if you dare we will try it."

"I am ready whenever you are."

"Let us fully understand each other."

It took only a few minutes to arrange the plan of procedure, which, it must be admitted, bordered upon rashness, but Sheriff Averill was no more anxious to make the attempt than was the young operator, who had already demonstrated his courage, coolness and fertility of resource.

The telegraphing had hardly ceased when the officer crept from beneath the platform as noiselessly as an Indian scout. He felt cramped from

his long constrained posture, but he was unusually powerful and athletic and quickly recovered his form. In the same stealthy manner he moved the short distance to the corner of the little structure, just beyond which were seated the two dozing villains.

The utter darkness favored his approach, and he paused only a few paces away, but as invisible as if in the very center of the surrounding forest. He did not see the men, though at one bound he could have leaped upon the shoulders of both.

"Hist!" muttered French Dick. "The handle of the door moved; he's coming out."

"Don't make any noise," warned Shorty Wales.

The dim light from the lamp at that moment fell upon the platform, showing that the door had been partly opened. Dick rose to his feet, stepped softly forward, and then dashed into the office.

The instant he entered, and before his companion, who waited to hear the results, could follow, the door was slammed shut, and French Dick and Adolph Ashland were alone within the building.

The convict, weapon in hand, glared around in the dim light. He could not see his victim, but he heard his voice:

"I've got the drop on you again, pard! Try to raise that pistol and I fire."

The words came from the rear, and, turning his head like a flash, the ruffian saw the slight figure

of the operator, with his back against the door, and his deadly weapon leveled at him.

Dick muttered an imprecation, for it was apparent that, when the telegraphist made his remark, it was more than a boast.

At the same moment a heavy fall was heard on the outside. Dolph fancied he also detected a clicking sound, such as is made by the snapping of a pair of handcuffs.

Whether he was correct in his judgment or not there could be no doubt that Sheriff Averill was doing his utmost to perform his part of the contract.

CHAPTER XI.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

WE must leave Sheriff Averill and Dolph Ashland for a brief while, in order to give attention to the westward bound Express, which left the station earlier in the evening.

It took Arthur Helmuth only a few minutes to arrange his business within the baggage car. All the trunks and parcels remaining were destined for Hurvan, the terminus of the railwa . There was no connecting line at that point, though a couple of stage routes joined the county town with the neighboring villages. There was talk of a new line, destined to tap the rich sections beyond, but the project was not likely to take shape for several years to come.

The young man glanced at the trunks and packages, and by comparison with his way-bill found everything was right. There was nothing calling for his attention, and at once, instead of seating himself as he had done before, he stepped to the front of the car, and, with his hands thrust in his trousers pockets and his feet spread a little apart in order to steady himself against the swing of the

train in passing round the curves, he looked through the glass in the upper part of the door at the tender and engine in front.

When leisure was at his command he was fond of taking his position and watching the locomotive, for it possessed the same charm and attraction to him that it does to nearly every one else.

Tom Ledwith, the veteran engineer, was sitting on the glazed cushion at the right of the cab, the support behind him, hiding most of his body, but his feet, half interlocked, were in sight, as well as the brawny arm partly extended, with the hand resting on the throttle lever. When he turned to look across at his fireman, as he occasionally did, the forepiece of his close fitting cap and his profile, with the briarwood pipe, were in sight. They came out with vivid clearness now and then under the glare from the opened furnace door.

The fireman found little time in which to rest or sit down. Stepping nimbly from his seat, he drew back the furnace door, showing the flaming interior, with the mouths of the many tubes, dimly seen through the yellow glow. Though everything appeared at a prodigious temperature, the fireman raking down the heavy lumps of coal shoveled in several hundred pounds, which instantly crackled and crumbled and glowed in the roaring flames. Then the door was kicked shut, and the young man climbed to his seat and peered out into the misty gloom through which the engine was plunging with

increasing speed, since there were several minutes to be picked up in the run to Hurvan, eighteen miles away.

In this wild and unbroken country the line was crossed by few roadways, but they appeared here and there. The fireman was so familiar with the run, that, before the white post darted forward as if to meet them out of the gloom, with the black mandate "RING" painted on it, he drew the rope back and forth, causing the bell to send its rich notes echoing among the trees on each side of the tracks.

The practice is growing in favor of making the least possible use of the ear splitting steam whistle. Only a few years ago it seemed to blow so continuously, night and day that it was a nuisance. The protests of outraged tympani have led to its disuse to that extent that it is no rare thing for a run of thirty, forty, and even more miles to be made without a single screech from the brazen snout.

Ledwith grasped the whistle cord several times, as if on the point of pulling it; but the necessity did not appear, and he shifted his hand again to the lever, where it rested until he wished to try the little stop-cocks which sloped down the bend of the boiler, with the brass pipe beneath, opening its mouth as if it were a thin serpent whose jaws were distended to catch the moisture made by the condensing steam that whizzed through the tiny openings.

Just below, and more nearly in front of the engineer, was the small horizontal handle, by which he controlled the brakes on the train with an effort so slight as to be almost imperceptible. The glass doors were fastened in front, for, aside from the rain which would have been driven through with blinding violence, the wind was almost strong enough to sweep engineer and fireman from their seats.

The dazzling headlight, as I have explained elsewhere, gives less help to the engineer than would be supposed.

Viewed by any one standing beside the track in front of the train it seems to illuminate the rails for a quarter of a mile or more, when, in point of fact, a person on the engine often feels a doubt whether the headlight is burning.

In one sense Engineer Ledwith was going it blind, for he was running fast, and was without the means of seeing more than a hundred yards or more ahead of him. The rails were slippery, but if they had not been, he could not have detected a landslide or an approaching train in time to avert a calamity. He had received word from Hurvan that the road was clear, or more properly speaking, the failure to receive warning that it was not clear, was proof that everything was all right.

Arthur Helmuth had stood in a similar situation so often that it may be said it had become a mechanical proceeding with him. His mind was

preoccupied with the singular events of the evening, and though he saw all that I have described on the engine, and many other little incidents that mark every such run, his thoughts were upon the unaccountable mistake made with check Number 2134, and with the meaning of the peremptory order from President Ketcham to secure the arrest of the man that had shown it to him on the train.

The reader has learned enough of the young baggage master to appreciate his brightness, but the whole business was beyond his ken. He was curious to learn the explanation, but saw that he must be content until the morrow and possibly for a longer time than that.

Now and then he found himself again asking the discomforting question, whether he could be held responsible for the blunder. He saw no way by which it could be laid at his door, but probably the consciousness that he had let the rogue slip through his fingers, and had not been as vigilant as he ought to have been, caused his mental uneasiness.

"I wonder whether I shall have a chance to retrieve my lapse?" he thought. "I hope so, for Mr. Ketcham has shown so much confidence in me that I would be distressed if he had to modify it."

Then, amid these unpleasant communings, would obtrude the sad speculation as to what was to be the result of the accident that had befallen the baggage master's little boy Dick.

Altogether, it must be admitted that Arthur Helmuth had spent many happier evenings than the one which saw him take his first westward trip in exclusive charge of the baggage and Express.

The run between Ardvale and Hurvan was about half completed when a most extraordinary sensation came over him. At first, he could not define it, but while gazing over the tender to the engine, absently watching the movements of the fireman, as he shoveled in coal, the conviction that something was wrong with the whole train increased upon him until it almost caused a panic on his part. What could it possibly be?

He looked around in the car, and at the rear door, through which he caught glimpses of the lights in the bounding passenger car following, but nothing met his eye that could explain it.

Turning about once more he peered ahead at the engine, startled by the fact that the impression had intensified, though for a minute or two, he could form no idea of what it all meant. It seemed perfectly inexplicable.

"There is some danger—some awful blunder—some calamity—my gracious! How did *that* happen?"

The whole truth came upon him like a lightning flash. While looking at the engine, he perceived that the Express, plunging westward at a high rate of speed, was running on the *wrong track!*

CHAPTER XII.

LIVELY WORK.

It would seem that French Dick's recent experience with Dolph Ashland should have saved him from stepping into the trap at the very moment it was set in front of his feet; but, on the other hand, what reason had he to fear the young man, now that he was joined by his own confederate? The two were fully armed and alert, and knew there was but the single person to be encountered inside; and, though he might be set down as "quick on the shoot," what chance had he against them?

In fact, the conduct of the operator himself had demonstrated that he realized he had no earthly show whatever. The moment he discovered the presence of the couple he had barred his door and window against their entrance.

The instant the door was opened, French Dick stepped inside, prepared for business. If he should make a slip, Wales was right behind him, and he was sure to even up things. The telegraph operator possibly might be sharp enough to secure the

drop once more on the rogue, but he couldn't get it on both him and his companion.

Enough has been said to justify the action of French Dick, for he had not the slightest ground to suspect that any other person was within miles of them. Had he dreamed of the true meaning of that *tapping, tapping*, kept up so long somewhere about the station, matters would have taken a different turn.

It was Sheriff Averill who appeared as the unexpected factor in the problem. Before Shorty Wales could step forward to his comrade's assistance, he heard a stealthy tread behind him, and, turning to learn what it meant, a fist shot forward out of the dense gloom, and stretched him as senseless as if he had been smitten by a cannon ball.

Such characters are tough, and the fellow quickly recovered, but when he did so he was helpless. Not only were his hands secured, but the prudent officer who had come well provided for such contingencies, tied his ankles so firmly that he could do nothing for himself.

Confident that his man was fast, Sheriff Averill gave his attention to the operator within the building. Stepping to the door he hesitated, uncertain whether it was wise to enter before gaining some knowledge of how matters stood. He recalled the understanding with his young friend, which, if carried out, should place him near the door at that

moment. At any rate, no harm could come from assuming that the agreement had been observed, the stillness within indicating that no harm had befallen Ashland.

The few quick taps given on the door asked:

"How have you succeeded?"

The position of the operator was favorable for replying. His right hand still held the leveled weapon, while the left was free, his back being against the door. The reply was prompt:

"I am holding him under my pistol: he has his in his hand and is watching for a chance to shoot."

"Where does he stand?"

"Near the middle of the outer apartment; I am so close to the door that it will strike me if opened."

"Stand aside, so as to let me come in, but look out that you don't give him a chance."

"How did you make out with your man?"

"I've got him fast; will you do as I wish?"

"Give me a half minute, then signal again, and, if you get no reply, you may know everything is ready."

While the officer was coolly awaiting the passage of the seconds, he heard the faint sound of a locomotive whistle. It seemed to be from the eastward, but he was not certain and had no time to inform himself.

Giving the signal agreed upon, he received no reply. Ashland had shifted his position and the door could be opened.

Sheriff Averill grasped the knob in his left hand, softly turned it, and then like a flash it was shoved back and he strode forward, with his weapon grasped in his other hand.

He found matters as he anticipated. French Dick was glowering at the youthful operator, who had never once lowered his revolver nor removed his forefinger from the trigger.

It is not likely this strained situation could have lasted many seconds longer. French Dick had caught enough of what was going on outside to know that he must do something for himself; and despite the threat of the insignificant youth who held him off, he would have taken the risk within the following minute, had not the burly officer made such an unexpected appearance on the scene.

The crisis came the next instant. In the dim light of the little room, the convict recoiled a couple of steps, still facing the two, and drew up his right hand with a startling suddenness; but it was the very thing the veteran officer expected him to attempt, and he prevented its success by bounding forward, before any aim could be taken, and, dropping his own weapon, seized the wrist of the other and gave it such a violent wrench that the fellow uttered a cry of pain as his revolver fell to the floor.

French Dick was not the man to surrender because he was summoned to do so or his case looked desperate, but he was assailed with such impet-

nosity that he was literally carried off his feet before he could pull himself together. He fell backward on the bench, and had hardly begun his fierce resistance when his hands were as securely imprisoned as those of his companion outside.

"It seems to me that I ought to give some help," remarked Dolph, turning up the light in the lamp the instant the struggle began, "though I am at a loss how to begin."

The officer was too busy with his man to warn his young friend to leave them alone. The telegraphist observed that while the couple were using their arms so strenuously, French Dick's legs were flying about like flails.

"He may do some damage to the sheriff," was his thought. Watching his chance, he threw both arms around one of the ankles, having first shoved his pistol into his hip pocket.

In his ardor he forgot he was no match in strength with the fellow, even though the latter was at such disadvantage. The convict gave only one kick, when Dolph shot through the air, narrowly missing the lamp in his flight, passing entirely over the partition, and landing on his own desk, where before he could stop himself, he described a back somersault, which was checked when half completed by his feet crashing through the window panes and against the shutter that was still closed.

At that moment the weapon in his pocket, in consequence of its violent usage, was discharged, the bullet entering the ceiling overhead.

"What's the matter?" repeated the young baggage master; "tell me, in the name of Jupiter, *why you are running on the left hand track.*"

Both engineer and fireman glanced around them. They repeated the looks several times, and then gazed at each other and at Arthur Helmuth in speechless amazement.

It was the fact. The Express should have kept to the right hand track the entire distance from New Center to Hurvan, that being the rule of the road for all trains, in whatever direction they were traveling, and here they were thundering over on the left hand rails, which belonged to the trains coming from the other end of the line. Had there been any engine or cars coming eastward, a disastrous collision must have followed.

The amazed Tom Ledwith could not find his voice until the train halted in the woods. The hour was so late that few of the passengers paid any heed to the stop, but the conductor discovered the strange blunder the moment the cars began braking up, and ran alongside to the engine, where he hastily climbed into the cab.

"My gracious!" he gasped, "what does this mean, Tom?"

"I'll be hanged if I know! I guess old 76 flopped across from the other rails, when we weren't watching," replied the engineer, with a grim smile; "why didn't you notice it, Jake?" he asked of his fireman.

"Because *you* didn't, I s'pose, but what was the matter with your eyes, Tom?"

"That's something I'll never understand," replied Ledwith, more thoughtfully; "it beats me. Somebody must have set the switches this side of Ardvale, and we changed tracks without my noticing it, though my hand was on her throttle at the time she crossed. It gets me," he added, with a shake of his head.

"How came you to notice it?" inquired the conductor.

"I didn't notice it. I s'pose I might have run right into Hurvan without seeing anything was wrong, if Arthur there hadn't pulled the rope."

"And I stood at the front door of my car," added young Helmuth, as the inquiring eyes were turned upon him, "looking at Tom and Jake, and watching the engine for a long time before I had sense enough to observe what I ought to have seen at the first glance. As soon as I was able to get it through my brain, I signaled Tom and hurried over the tender to wake him up."

"Well, boys," said the engineer, with another shake of his head, "you know what this means?"

"What's that?"

"My walking papers; old Ketcham will never forgive such a thing, and I can't blame him."

"It may not be so bad as that," replied Arthur sympathetically.

"You don't know the president as well as I do,

but we must run back near Ardvale; there'll be no reaching Hurvan to-night on time."

"That's of no account," remarked the conductor, "provided we get there, but it will be rather hard explaining what it was that made us late."

The H. & N. C. Railway, although it was fast adopting modern ways and improvements, allowed its employees considerable latitude. Thus the unparalleled blunder of the Express resulted in placing it in such grave peril, that, in backing to the proper spot to regain the right track, it should have kept a brakeman walking several hundred yards in advance, carrying a light in order to warn any trains that had the right to the track. This would have held the progress of the Express at no greater rate than that of a man on foot but it would have insured safety.

The conductor and engineer, however, reasoned that it was almost impossible that there should be anything between them and Ardvale. The only train to approach from that direction was the freight, which was not due for several hours.

There was just one chance in a hundred of a wild cat engine approaching from the other direction, and in which event disastrous results must follow, but conductor and engineer deemed themselves warranted in disregarding that possibility.

A brakeman, therefore, took his place on the rear platform, by the red light, with the bell cord grasped, ready to give the signal the instant he

caught sight of danger. The engineer started the train at moderate speed, seating himself, so that his back was toward the front of his engine, while his head thrust out of the cab, faced the other way, and the retrogression began.

When the passengers awoke to the fact that at the end of a half hour, the train was still going in the reverse direction, there were many inquiries as to the cause. The rule on railroads forbids any employee imparting any information under such circumstances. When, therefore, an imaginative brakeman spread the story that one of the valves of the engine had become broken in such a peculiar manner, that it was necessary to run back to a place where the engineer had dropped a monkey wrench, at the side of the track, before the danger could be repaired, the explanation was generally accepted as the true one. It must be said, however, there were some who showed by their questions that they entertained grave doubts of the reliability of their informants.

It was apparent that some one, not belonging to the road, had shifted the switches, so as to lead the Express from the right to the left track, since it was clearly beyond the power of any one connected with the train to do such a thing. The proceeding, whose motive could not be guessed, was not a tenth part as extraordinary as the fact that the engineer and his fireman could follow the switch from one set of rails to the other, without

noticing it, afterward watching the course of the engine for miles without discovering the amazing occurrence.

But for my personal knowledge of the fact, as already stated, I would hardly dare to put it on record.

Arthur Helmuth waited on the engine until the retrogression began, when he climbed back to his post of duty, hardly less impressed by the occurrence than was the engineer himself. He could not account for the forgetfulness or oversight of Tom Ledwith, whose reputation for care and skill was not surpassed by any one in the employ of the H. &. N. C. Railway Company.

It was not this phase of the question, however, which disturbed him. No one was freer from superstition than he, but he was stirred by the recollection that the extraordinary slip was only one of several puzzling incidents of the same evening, all dating from the time he assumed charge of the baggage and express, to oblige Browne, on his reception of the news of the accident to his little boy.

The conclusion was unavoidable that there was a connection among them all. The man who under the name of Hugh Barnes presented the check calling for the missing baggage, was not as angry as he pretended to be; for he was playing his part in some evil plan whose full purport was not yet clear. Back of it all, was the inciting cause which placed the Express on the wrong track.

It was natural perhaps that this conclusion should be formed, but even that did not solve the mystery as to the meaning of the strange business. It was not unlikely that the trunk episode was part of a scheme to force the railway company to pay a round sum for the stolen property, but that failed to answer the question which Arthur was not alone in asking himself.

"What was the object of switching off the train from the right to the wrong track?"

The first thought was that a catastrophe was intended in which there would be a chance to secure valuable booty, and yet that explanation did not answer, for the method in vogue among train robbers throughout the country—that of derailing a train by placing obstructions on the rails—was not only simple but attended with less risk to the criminals. By the common method, the accident must occur at a known point, while in the supposed one, there was no saying whether the calamity would take place at all; and, if it did, it must insure the presence of two instead of one set of trainmen to overcome.

"I haven't hit upon the real cause," was Arthur's decision, "but it must appear before long. Ah, we are close to the switch," he added, as the engineer began slowing up.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ACCIDENT.

It was easy for Arthur, even when surrounded by such impenetrable gloom, to know where they were. They were approaching the switch from which the transfer had been made. It was not far from the dismal station of Ardvale, where, as has been shown, Dolph Ashland, the telegraph operator, was having such an interesting experience with the escaped convicts.

The Express felt its way as the point was reached, and came to a halt some distance from the switches. The rear brakeman ran back, lantern in hand, to see that everything was right. As he anticipated, the switches were turned so that, without interfering with them, the train had only to continue backing to place itself on the opposite track. This was done, after which they were set right and several of the train hands spent a few minutes in investigation.

Nothing was discovered, except that some one possessing a switch key, or who was a skillful picker of locks, had made the changes which were

the cause of the astonishing occurrence. No trace that could give a hint of the identity of the parties was found. The general conclusion was that some one had done the trick out of a spirit of mischief, with no thought of the consequences liable to follow.

This, I say, was the general belief; but there were not wanting those who thought otherwise, and among them was Arthur Helmuth, who kept up his speculation over the incidents of the evening with as little satisfaction in the way of solution as at the time of their actual occurrence.

Tom Ledwith, still wondering how it all came about, started 76 ahead. He glanced at his watch, and observed that he had already lost so much time that it was useless to try to regain it. The best he could do was to steam into Hurvan nearly an hour late, and on account of the blank darkness of the night he decided to slacken his pace instead of increasing it.

"Jake," he said, addressing his fireman, who was standing close to him at that moment, "I want you to help look out to-night. It makes me shiver even now to think of what we both did a while ago."

"I'll do my best, for I feel as bad as you do."

"Like enough we'll get swung over to the other track again before we know it."

"It's a bad night for running, but I hope we'll get through without any more funny business."

"I'm going to take things easy, but something will turn up before we strike Hurvan—depend on *that*."

The fireman just then stooped down and opened the furnace door, through which he flung several shovelfuls of coal, when he resumed his seat on the left, peering intently through the misty glass in front. He was so careful that now and then he unhooked it sufficiently to allow him to reach out his hand with a piece of waste and clear off the mist.

With the feeling that the responsibility for the safety of the train rested on him, Tom Ledwith was the type of vigilance. He paid little attention to his assistant, but devoted himself to the running of his admirable engine. He dallied with the lever till the pace suited him. From the switches to Hurvan was about eight miles, and he meant to devote more than half an hour to the run. This was so moderate in the way of speed that every one ought to have felt safe.

Although the headlight illuminated the gloom only a short distance beyond the pilot, the brakes could be made to accomplish something in that space, and the rate of travel was so slow that, if derailed without any chance of using the brakes, little damage was likely to result, excepting at one or two points.

Two miles from the switches the Express approached a piece of trestle work, the middle of which

was fully fifty feet above the small stream winding beneath. It looked like the work of some huge spider, and seemed unable to bear a heavy weight; but it was constructed by expert engineers, and was fully equal to all demands ever likely to be made upon it.

This was one of the points looked upon with misgiving by Ledwith, who drew his iron horse down to a slow walk as he neared the structure, scrutinizing every foot of the track and bridge itself that came under his experienced vision. Though he had crossed it times without number, and sometimes at a much faster pace than the present, he could never avoid a shudder as from his cab he looked down through the network of irons and timbers to the rivulet far below. He pictured in his mind the scene that would follow if they should collapse at the instant 76 was over the middle of the span. He had been in several accidents, but in none of the nature of this. He wondered how he would feel when going downward; whether he would breathe, and if so, how many times; whether he would retain his senses after striking, and whether he would be crushed in the wreck, scalded to death by escaping steam, pinned fast and slowly consumed by fire, or whether by some miraculous interference he would manage to escaped death.

Tom had seen that same rivulet expand into a prodigious torrent, whose surface was just below the

rails. Somehow or other he felt at such times as though he was safer in case of accident than before. The shuddering depth of the ravine was filled with water, which seemed to furnish a foundation for the structure itself; while, if he must fall, he preferred to drop into the current at once rather than take a preliminary dive of half a hundred feet.

Jake the fireman was equally intent upon scanning the structure as they slowly rolled upon it. Nothing wrong was detected by either, and letting steam into the cylinders, before the wheels ceased to revolve, the Express gradually increased its pace until it struck the solid ground on the other side.

It is not likely that either the engineer or fireman would have confessed the truth to each other, but they placed themselves in the best position for jumping, though precious little chance of saving himself would either have had in case of a giving way of the structure.

"I guess we're all right," called Jake, stepping over to the engineer's side and shouting in his ear; "hadn't you better give her a little more steam?"

"That's what I am doing, but I feel pokerish to-night, Jake, and if I should follow up that piece of tomfoolery with another slip, salt wouldn't save me with old Ketcham."

The fireman said nothing more, but returned to his seat and began pulling the bell for a crossing, over which probably about three teams a week found their way.

The country now for several miles was quite level. The trees grew close to the track on both sides, and were dripping with moisture from the drizzling rain that had continued for several hours. The trunks gleamed in the light from the front of the engine, and the steel rails glistened from the same cause. At such times, the danger from the wheels slipping, when the brakes are applied, renders the engineer cautious, and, in keeping down to a moderate pace, Ledwith was only acting the part of prudence.

His nervous state was continually shown by his manner. Several times he shut off steam quickly and grasped the little lever controlling the brakes; but, before applying them he saw that that which he took for some obstruction on the track was only the product of his fancy. The figures of men, who appeared to be crouching under the shadows of the trees, ready to assail the train when it should come to a standstill, were only stumps or fragments of trees themselves.

Finally the Express approached a long curve, beyond which the line was almost mathematically straight to Hurvan. Ledwith began to feel a rising of spirits, and had about decided to give 76 more steam immediately after passing the bend, when the very accident he had been dreading from the first took place.

He knew from the violent jolt and swaying of the engine that she had left the rails.

CHAPTER XV.

THROUGH TO HURVAN.

THE derailment of No. 76 was accompanied by more than one noteworthy fact. In the first place, it was not complete, only the truck wheels on each side leaving the track. The drivers and all behind them remained on the rails. The speed was so moderate that the engine came to a standstill within fifty feet, but during that distance the plunging and jolting were violent enough to startle even such a veteran as Tom Ledwith.

The front of the locomotive dipped and swayed and staggered like some huge creature struggling in the waves of the ocean, and it looked for a moment or two as if it were about to overturn. The startled fireman made a move to leap off, but was checked by his engineer, who shouted:

"Stay where you are!"

The emergency called for an instant reversal of the engine with full application of the steam, at the risk of blowing out the cylinder heads, but that, with the quick application of the brakes, and the still greater resistance caused by the forward

trucks bumping over the ties, stopped the train right speedily.

With the instincts of an engineer, Tom Ledwith seized his small lantern, and leaping to the ground the moment things settled down, he ran forward to learn the cause of the trouble.

The trucks, in leaving the rails, had slewed to the right, that is, away from the other track, so that travel would not be impeded on that side. A brakeman was immediately sent back, and another to the front, to remain until the engine should regain the rails.

"I'll be hanged if this don't get me!" exclaimed the engineer, after groping around for several minutes with his lantern at the front of his engine; "everything seems to be all right, which being the case, I would like to know what business 76 had to play such a trick, any way."

Meanwhile, Arthur Helmuth had emerged from the front door of the baggage car with a lantern also in hand. Hearing the words of Tom, he said:

"The trouble must have been with the track; let's take a look."

It was easy to discover the point of derailment, since the flanges of the truck wheels had cut deeply into the ties and gravel, leaving a trail which could be followed with the aid of the smallest amount of light.

"Here we are!" called out Tom, stopping near the middle of the first passenger car.

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There was no danger of a sudden starting of the engine, and the two crawled under to make their investigation.

"I don't see anything that will help us," remarked the engineer a minute later; "it must be that 76 has got the tantrums to-night, and jumped the track, just as an engine sometimes does out of pure contrariness."

"Hold on; here is something," said Arthur, holding his lantern close to the right rail. Tom moved to his side, crouching low to save himself from bumping his head.

A striking discovery followed. A rail had been loosened throughout the entire length. All the spikes were missing, as well as the bed plate at the eastern end, which was first struck by the wheels of the engine. This had been left in proper position, so that it was impossible for the engineer to notice anything wrong when within twenty feet of it. By some ingenious arrangement, which had been so knocked askew that it could not be fully understood, the rail was to be turned out of place the instant it was struck by the front wheels.

This must have occurred, though not to the extent intended, and with consequences altogether unexpected. The derailment of the truck wheels, joined to the weight of the drivers, brought the rail back almost instantly, and, although the fastenings were missing, it was in exact place.

That this was the deliberate work of parties who

meant to throw the train from the track, was self-evident. The discovery affected both Arthur and the engineer deeply, but nothing was to be gained by speculation, nor was there time to indulge in it.

As the two emerged from under the car, each involuntarily held his lantern above his head and peered among the trees, as if he expected to meet the wretches who had made the daring attempt at train wrecking, but nothing was to be seen of them, and they hurried to the front of the train.

The stoppage naturally caused a stir among the passengers, who were in bad humor, because of the protracted delays they had undergone since leaving Ardvale. They were on the platforms, growling, making inquiries, and threatening all sorts of things, because of the inconvenience to which they were subjected by accident for which none of the train men were responsible.

The next step, or more properly the first step, was to get the trucks of the engine on the rails again. Fortunately they were only a few inches out of alignment, and, as already said, showed no evidence of injury from rough usage. Blocks of wood were adjusted behind them after the fashion probably familiar to the reader, and, when everything was ready, the engineer put on full steam.

It was a severe strain on 76, for she was obliged to push the whole train backward, but she went bravely at it, the drivers slipping somewhat, despite

the sand that was plentifully distributed on the rails. All at once the billets of wood, which had been so deftly arranged that the trucks were lifted above the rails, slid over and dropped upon the track, though they held only by the fraction of an inch.

The locomotive was still laboring awkwardly, and there was a general shout to Tom to stop, the railway men flinging up their hands in their earnestness. He shut off steam, but, though the drivers described barely a quarter of a revolution, the whole four truck wheels dropped off into the gravel again.

The proceeding had to be gone over once more, but it was done with the least possible delay.

Some of the pieces of wood had been crushed and twisted out of shape, but they were laid as skillfully as before, and, when everything was ready, 76 began wrenching backward again. She labored prodigiously, the train men walking beside her, bending over, with their lamps above their heads, watching every movement, and shouting their suggestions to Lee with, who held himself ready to stop the second he was warned to do so.

All at once there was a jolt, or rather a series of them. The trucks were on the rails again; then off, then they ran along within a hair of the side, and while every one was shouting to Tom to stop, and while he was striving to do so, the space increased, the flanges of the wheels that were turning on the face of the rail dropped on the inside with a jolt

that jarred the whole engine, and everything became smooth.

No. 76 was again in place on the track, and all was well.

Just as the congratulations became general, a bright glow, as if from Venus, gleamed among the trees in front, and was seen to be gliding round the curve on the other track. It was the headlight of the engine sent from Hurvan to learn the cause of the delay of the Express.

The two locomotives exchanged greetings, through their whistles, and were soon side by side, when it took only a short time for an understanding to be reached.

The engine which had come from Hurvan with implements provided for use in case of a wreck, was too late to give help, because it was not needed. It was known that the track was clear in both directions, though the time was approaching for the Western freight to follow the passenger train. It was easy for the latter to gain upon it, and, since the distance to Hurvan was only a few miles, and there were no more dangerous points to be crossed, this was done.

The solitary engine steamed along only a short way to the rear, on the other track, and the arrival at the terminus took place without further incident.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DARING PROCEEDING.

THE Express, on its way to New Center, steamed into Beavertown the next morning on time. The injury to the rail near Ardvale was so slight that it was speedily repaired, and the break in the telegraph line to the eastward of the same lonely station, was quickly found and mended.

Dolph Ashland, the plucky telegraph operator, was on duty bright and early; and, when the accommodation train halted for the single farmer who was waiting to take passage, the conductor gave the compliments of Sheriff Averill to the effeminate young man, with the pleasing announcement that he would receive one half the standing reward of fifty dollars for every escaping convict returned to the institution. Had the capture been deferred a few days, this reward doubtless would have been largely increased, but it was very well as it was, Ashland declaring that he was fully satisfied because of the fun it afforded him.

The weather had cleared away, and the sun was shining in the crisp autumn air, so that, but for the mystifying incidents of the preceding even-

ing, Arthur Helmuth would have been in capital spirits.

The first person upon whom his eyes rested as the train slowed up at Beavertown was Ezekiel Browne, the baggage master, who seemed to be wating for him.

"How is your little boy?" was the first question of Arthur, as he sprang off and caught his hand.

"Thank you, he is so much better that I shall go to work again."

"Don't make any haste about it; I can manage very well, that is if no more duplicate checks are run in on me; how was Dick hurt?"

"He was playing in the road, when a runaway horse dashed past and the wheel passed over one arm and his body; the arm was broken, but that will soon come right; what the doctor feared was that he had suffered internal injuries; but he thinks this morning that all danger is over."

While the two were talking, the station baggage master came forward.

"President Ketcham wants to see you."

"Where is he?"

"In his office; you are to leave the train for the present."

Arthur's heart rose in his mouth, and his face flushed to such a degree that his friend hastened to say:

"It isn't anything of *that* sort; he has no fault

to find, but I reckon he wants to hold a council of war with you."

"Have you those two checks I turned over to you last night?"

"I rather think I have; I intend to have them framed."

"Will you let me look at them?"

The other brought them forth from an inner pocket, where he had placed them to prevent their going into service again.

Arthur scrutinized the two corresponding bits of brass, with an interest which it would be hard to imagine. Each was stamped so clearly with the figures "2134," that there could be no possible mistake as to their correspondence.

"They are genuine," said he, passing them back to his friend, "but they do not look any more so than the check which was handed me in the baggage car, after we left here last night."

"One of them must be a fraud, and I don't think it is this one."

"You would be just as positive about the other if you could see it."

"You haven't got it with you?"

"No; the holder took good care that it should not pass into my hands, after he learned something was wrong."

"You saw both strangers then who were interested in the trunk?"

"I did; and though I did not study their appear-

ance, they looked as similar to me as the two checks."

Although the main building of the H. & N. C. Railway was at New Center, President Ketcham had an office also at Beavertown. He spent a part of his time there, because his home was in the town, although most of his work was done at New Center. Young Helmuth made his way to the handsomely carpeted and furnished office, where he found the head of the company alone, a caller just coming out from the inner office, as Arthur passed in.

The president greeted him pleasantly, and, motioning him to draw up his chair near him, plunged into business at once.

"You have heard about the New Center bank?" was his first inquiring remark.

"I do not know to what you allude, sir."

"What! didn't you know the bank was robbed yesterday afternoon?"

"This is the first I have heard of it."

"That is singular, for it took place soon after the close of business hours, which was a considerable while before your train left."

"But was it discovered immediately?"

"No—which is why you learned nothing of it, though it ought to have reached your ears before this."

"May I inquire the particulars?"

"You know, perhaps, I am a director in the bank, and I expected to be present at the meeting yester-

day, but was delayed. President Mackintosh had left and gone home, and there were inside only the cashier and two clerks, adjusting their accounts, when two men suddenly appeared from the rear offices. They must have entered by the back windows—in fact we know they did, and if ever there were professionals, they belong to the class. In a twinkling the clerks were covered with revolvers. The cashier sprang for his pistol, but before he could get it, a third scoundrel, who had not been seen before, leaped through the rear door, and struck him such a fearful blow with the butt of an Army and Navy revolver that he pitched forward senseless."

"Was no outcry made?"

"Only the cry of agony, as the faithful fellow received the blow. The clerks were so awed that they did not dare open their mouths. The burglars kept the muzzles of their pistols at their heads, while the third man busied himself gathering the spoils."

"How much did he get?"

"More than one hundred thousand dollars in national bank bills."

"Is it possible!"

"Is is the sad truth; he went about his work as coolly as if he had a day before him. In fact the scoundrels had managed business so well that they were quite safe from interruption for several

hours, since the bank being closed, no call, unless an accidental one, was likely to be made."

"Of course the burglars were masked?"

"Your question leads me to make an extraordinary statement. The couple who held the clerks quiet at the muzzle of their pistols, were so masked that not the first glimpse could be obtained of their countenances. They were dressed in ordinary citizens' suits, but the third man, who gathered up the booty and stowed it away in the singular trunk he brought with him, not only wore no mask but seemed to take pains to let his features be seen. His fine silk hat was shoved away from his forehead, and he smiled and uttered his jokes while engaged in his nefarious work, and while the poor cashier lay groaning with pain."

"They were not interrupted?"

"Some one tried the door, evidently a late customer, who wanted accommodation, and this man who was stooping in front of the open safe, called out, asking him to come again at the end of half an hour, and he went off."

"I never heard of such daring."

"You haven't heard the most astounding portion of the business. The fellow took no bonds nor gold, though considerable was within reach, but gathering up the packages of national bank notes, walked from behind the counter and stowed them away until he had all he wanted. He made three trips between the safe and his

trunk, after which he coolly told his companions how much he had obtained and suggested that that was sufficient."

"And what reply did they make?" asked the deeply interested Arthur.

"They must have held him in great awe, for they replied that they were content that he should do as he thought best. Thereupon he lifted the small trunk with one hand, walked through into the rear apartment, and they saw him no more."

"Did not the clerks raise the alarm at once?"

"Hardly; the scamps with the revolvers held their places for half an hour, so as to give their confederate time to get away. Then one of them withdrew, and the other stayed a half hour longer, before he slipped out. He was exceedingly cunning. After being out of sight for a few seconds, he would suddenly reappear, pistol in hand, ready to shoot, as he said, if he found they had shifted their positions in the slightest. They didn't know when to expect him, but, after he had been away longer than usual, the chief clerk ventured to peep into the rear rooms. The fellow had probably been gone some time."

"*Then* the alarm was raised?"

"Certainly, but it was too late. The cashier was in so dangerous a condition that he required immediate attention, and he is in serious danger at this moment. The police were notified, and found

an individual who said he saw a man enter a light carriage, at the rear of the bank, after depositing a small trunk in front, and drive off rapidly to the country. He seemed to be making for the wooded section which lies back of New Center, and the search was instantly concentrated in that direction."

"Can you describe the one who took the money?"

"He was of medium size, with dark hair, eyes, mustache and side whiskers, and was well dressed."

"You say he carried away the money in a trunk? Can you describe it?"

"That is readily done; it was quite small, heavily secured, and covered with innumerable nails, whose heads were either of highly polished brass or gilt."

"That then was the trunk which I checked at New Center."

"Undoubtedly."

"And the story of a man driving off in a carriage into the country was a trick to mislead the officers."

"That is equally evident," replied President Ketcham, pleased with the quickness of his young friend.

"But how was it that none of the police were at the station?"

"There were two on duty, with particular in-

structions to watch for the man I have described."

"It looks as if they were implicated in the crime, and bribed not to see what took place under their very noses."

"I had not thought of that," remarked the president; "but we must not do them injustice; the time between the notification of the officers and the departure of the train was brief, and the descriptions they obtained were given so hastily that they may be excusable for going astray."

"They might be as concerned the leading burglar, but how could they fail to identify the trunk?"

"Unfortunately the description of that was not furnished them until later in the evening. The clerks were flustered, and forgot all about the telltale trunk, until the chief questioned them afterwards."

CHAPTER XVII.

A COUNCIL OF WAR.

AFTER President Ketcham's last remark Arthur was thoughtful for a minute, and then looking up said:

"It would be presumptuous in me to offer any suggestions, where so many older than I are at sea."

"Not at all; the skill you showed in capturing those fellows who robbed Jared Wonzell last year gives me much confidence in your judgment, and I am free to tell you that I count on your assistance in this most perplexing business."

"I feel much flattered, but though circumstances have involved me in a way not altogether pleasing to myself, I cannot hope to be of much help."

"That remains to be seen; as you have learned the particulars of the burglary from me, it is my place also to tell you that our bank has offered five thousand dollars reward for the capture of the criminals and the recovery of the stolen funds. A few more runs of good luck like you had in the Wonzell case will make you a bloated bond-holder," added the president with a smile.

Arthur's heart beat quicker at these words, but he could not fail to appreciate the vast difficulties in the way of his success in this new undertaking.

"I may be wrong," said he, "but after thinking over what you have told me, I believe that the robbery of the bank, the escape of French Dick and Shorty Wales, the cutting of the telegraph wires between here and Ardvale, the turning of the switches and the derailment of the Express last night, all have a connection with each other."

President Ketcham's face became grave.

"Possibly you are right, though no explanation or theory can excuse the amazing blunder committed by Engineer Ledwith, the particulars of which were telegraphed me this morning, immediately after the line was repaired."

"It was unaccountable, but Ledwith is such an excellent engineer, he has always been so careful and fortunate, while the repetition of his oversight is so impossible, that I hope, Mr. Ketcham, you will pardon him; he could not feel more humiliated had he been involved in a serious accident."

"Let that pass, for the present, and come back to the business before us. Naturally, when I learned of the escape of those two criminals from prison, my thought was that they were concerned in the burglary, but it needed little investigation to show that it was impossible. Hurvan is seventy miles from New Center, and they could not have reached the latter point in time to take part in the burglary.

True, a railway train would have carried them to the spot, but they would have been identified by the conductor, and it is certain they did not come over on any train from Hurvan. They were seen by Sheriff Averill yesterday afternoon in the neighborhood of Ardvale, so they would not only have had to make the journey from Hurvan, but to return almost to the same point on the same day. No, they are out of the question."

"But they may be members of the same gang."

"That is not unlikely. Another point that passes my comprehension is this: the masking of two of the burglars, while a third, who was the most active, took pains to allow his face to be seen."

"Could there not have been an object in that?"

"I do not understand you."

"It seems to me that although that rogue was not masked, yet he was disguised, and, therefore, as effectively masked as the other two. His whiskers and mustache may have been false, his voice feigned, his hair a wig, and his whole appearance the opposite of his natural self."

"But the man for whom you checked the trunk answered the description of the burglar."

"But he must been another person altogther. The criminal got himself up in close imitation of a party who had nothing directly to do with the robbery."

"But the trunk was the same."

"As nearly as we can judge it was—that is, it *looked* like it."

"The two checks, the claiming of the baggage by the man holding one of the checks, and his disappearance—what of *them?*"

Arthur shook his head with a laugh.

"I have asked myself those questions, as well as many others, and cannot answer them."

"You have made several startling suggestions, however, which well be of use to us. I am more at sea than you, but light will break upon us before long. When I learned of your inquiry about the check, I had found out sufficient concerning the trunk, with the gilt-headed nails, to feel confident the chief criminal was on the train, and I telegraphed you that he should not escape."

"Unfortunately your order reached us too late."

"I am aware of that, though the cutting of the wires caused an exasperating delay in ascertaining the trouble."

"If the theories I have hinted at prove correct, it is not unlikely that the person who declared he saw a man drive off with the trunk in a carriage told the truth after all; do you know who this informant is?"

"I have made no inquiries about him, but there ought to be no difficulty in locating him."

"It seems to me that this ought to be done without delay, for much depends on him."

"I will not forget what you say; but, on the presumption that the trunk for which the duplicate

checks were held was not the one containing the stolen money, can you offer any reason why it should have been claimed by *two* persons?"

"It seems to me that might have been done to direct special attention to it and to divert attention from the true one. To suppose that a gang of professional burglars would carry their booty directly from the bank to the railway station in broad daylight, within an hour or two of the robbery, is to suppose what to me seems an absurdity on the part of a lot of natural born fools."

"So it strikes me, and, therefore, we must not bear too hard on the officers who failed to arrest the owner of the trunk when he must have passed right in front of them."

"But," said young Helmuth, starting up, "the individual who actually got the trunk did so at *this* station, and walked with it up the platform; what became of *him?*"

"I wish I knew. After he came through the gate, he vanished as utterly, as far as we can learn, as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up," and the railway president knitted his brows in perplexity.

"One thing, however, is clear, Mr. Ketcham; you ought to employ the best professional detective that can be engaged," Arthur ventured to suggest.

"*We have*," said the president in a lower voice, "and he is in this building at this very minute."

CHAPTER XVIII.

PRESIDENT KETCHAM AND THE DETECTIVE.

ARTHUR HELMUTH started in his chair and looked behind him, expecting to see the individual alluded to by President Ketcham. The latter smiled.

"I believe it is the custom in stories," he said, "for detectives to take every one they meet by the buttonhole and tell him the particulars of their plans. They don't do it in life, however, Arthur, for if they did, they wouldn't detect. It is true that we have employed one of that profession, and he is in the building this moment, but I shall not take the pleasure of introducing you to him. Now that we have discussed the business pretty fully, I will say that I want your help in getting at the bottom of the extraordinary business that has been going on for the past few days. You may be able to do nothing at all, and you may give us material aid; you will not go back on the road until notified to do so. Of course you are in our employ all the time."

Young Helmuth was quick to take a hint, and, rising to his feet, he thanked his friend and passed

out of the office. He had been gone only a minute or two, when the door of a small apartment immediately beyond the private room of the president opened, and a man in a business suit of gray, with keen eyes, and a wide awake look, stepped within, and sat down in the chair just vacated by Arthur Helmuth. He held his fine beaver in one hand and crossed his legs as he took his seat, after the manner of one who feels at home.

"Well, what do you think of him, Mr. Cinch?" was the question of President Ketcham, as he too wheeled about, so as to face one of the most famous of Blackerton's detectives.

"He is unusually intelligent and quick-witted. Some of his suggestions were excellent and he anticipated you more than once in his solution of puzzling questions."

"I knew you would be pleased with him; did you get a view of his face?"

"O, yes—I studied his countenance through the crack in the door, while he was talking. No one can question his good looks, for he is one of the most attractive young men I ever saw. That bright eye, rosy cheek and elastic step don't belong to one who uses cigarettes, cigars or a pipe, or who drinks alcohol."

"No; he is free from those vices," remarked President Ketcham, as he drew a couple of cigars from his upper vest pocket, and passing one to his guest, proceeded to enjoy his smoke; "which

reminds me how lamentable it is that so many of our youths *do* smoke."

"You would be surprised if you knew how many of the worst criminals neither drink nor use tobacco in any form."

"Are there many such?"

"It is hardly right to speak of them as many, but the number is considerable. They include some of the most dangerous lawbreakers to be found anywhere. You understand the reason; they are liberally provided with brains by nature, and their profession requires the use of every particle of that commodity. Consequently, they are too wise to injure themselves by dissipation."

President Ketcham was conscious at that moment of a pang, produced by the words of Detective Cinch. It flashed upon him that the other suspected Arthur Helmuth of being implicated in crooked work.

As his comment upon the president's statement that the young man did not use alcohol or tobacco, the officer had remarked that some of the most vicious criminals in the country were equally abstemious. Did he mean to imply, by that remark, that Arthur belonged to the same class?

The question which entered the president's head was a startling one and he found it hard to be himself in the brisk conversation that followed.

This was not due altogether to the fact that Mr. Cinch, whose profession would not allow any class

in the community to be exempt from suspicion, looked upon the youth's guilt as among the possibilities, but because Mr. Ketcham found himself considering the question: can there be any foundation for such suspicion?

It is a sad fact that in these days no profession and no continuance of exemplary life are proof against financial temptation. President Ketcham gave his confidence to young Helmuth, whose progress he had watched from infancy, and yet he recalled a somewhat similar case occurring before Arthur was born, in which a young man went to the bad through no one's fault but his own. The evil elements in his nature overcame the good.

Young Helmuth, so far as the outside world was able to judge, was a model youth, but no one beside himself could know whether such was absolutely the fact or not. All his ingenious theorizing might be framed with the view of diverting suspicion, not only from himself but from the guilty parties as well.

What was easier than for him to step from his post, as he had done the day before, and check the trunk for the applicant to whom he gave the piece of brass numbered 2134? Then, as the president recalled, there were no witnesses to the interview which Arthur described as taking place in the baggage car, when Hugh Barnes presented the check bearing that number.

Altogether the situation was discomforting. Whether Detective Cinch aimed to do so or not,

he had implanted a doubt in the mind of President Ketcham which inflicted its sting from the beginning.

"I believe," said the latter, carefully concealing the disturbing thoughts, "that you have garnered about all the information that I can furnish you, Mr. Cinch, and of course you will follow your own judgment."

The detective nodded, and with little apparent interest in the question, he remarked:

"I believe young Helmuth is a native of this place?"

"He lives a short distance out of town, with his mother, who has been a widow for several years; he is of great help to her. In fact, she would have had a hard time to get along without him."

"The reward he obtained for helping to run down the men who robbed old Jared Wonzell must have been welcome to both."

"Unquestionably it was; even you and I, Mr. Cinch, would find such a sum rather convenient."

"I quite agree with you," said the detective, with his quiet smile, "though I have had little experience in that direction."

"The widow owed money to Wonzell, which they were able to pay, beside clearing off a mortgage on their home, after which they found a neat sum left over in the savings bank."

"This bright young man whom you have given employment on your railroad has never been engaged elsewhere?"

"I beg pardon."

"I mean to ask whether he has been employed in New York or Philadephia, or in any other place before entering your service."

"No," replied the president, his feeling of discomfort increasing; "he was the best scholar in the Beavertown school, until a little more than a year ago, when it became necessary for him to do something to help his mother. Knowing his good qualities, I gave him a situation as assistant baggage and express agent on our road, and no one could have done his duty better. It was about that time that it became his good fortune to aid in the capture of the criminals who robbed Jared Wonzell of his money and he secured the large reward offered. I afterward learned that he paid a negro, named Roorback Johnson, a good sum because of help the fellow gave in tracing the rogues. I mention this to show the sense of justice which governs Arthur Helmuth at all times."

Detective Cinch had not said anything in the way of accusation of the youth, but the certainty of Mr. Ketcham that he did suspect him, roused the latter to his defense. He resented the distrust of his companion, which, as I have shown, he shared to a slight extent himself.

Mr. Cinch continued his probing questions with the manner of one who was striving to while away a few minutes, rather than to seek information of value. If he imagined that the railway president was misled he was altogether mistaken.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

ARTHUR HELMUTH left President Ketcham's office and walked up the platform to the main street, more thoughtful than he had been in a long time. He could feel little hope of realizing the dream the official awoke in his mind, when he spoke of the large reward offered by the bank for the recovery of the stolen funds and the capture of the criminals. He realized too clearly that his success in that line the previous year was only a piece of good fortune which rarely comes to a man more than once in a lifetime, and as a rule does not come to him at all.

"He tells me he has employed a professional detective, so there won't be much use for *me*. I may drop upon points in drifting about the country, but I don't know where to look for them; it strikes me that the best thing is to go home and have a talk with mother—I wonder whether that fellow is signaling to me."

Arthur was walking along the principal street of Beavertown, when he heard a whistle behind him. It sounded as if meant to attract attention,

and was repeated so often that he suspected it was meant for him. Turning his head, he quickly located the author of the call.

A colored youth, in the most gorgeous costume he had ever seen, was walking on the other side of the street, in the same direction with himself, keeping only a short distance to the rear, and seeking to attract his attention by means of his bursts of whistling.

He wore a silk tile, so glossy that it might have served for a mirror. It was tipped so far over one corner of his forehead that it veiled the eye leaving the other, which however was large and protuberant enough to do double duty, in full sight. His snowy shirt collar reached well up outside his cheeks, his immense necktie was a symposium in rainbows, as were the big figured vest and the broad striped trousers. The shoes were of patent leather, and though the largest the town afforded, cramped his feet wofully.

The dusky youth had managed to draw on a pair of white cotton gloves, and carried a cane with an enormous carved head, which he swung about and dallied with, as a policeman toys with his club when no head is within convenient reach.

While engaged in whistling, the sable gentleman carried a cigar in his other hand, but as Arthur looked around, he shoved it between his handsome white teeth, the lighted end turned upward, so that it was almost in front of the single eye that was on

duty, while the hat remained tilted over his forehead.

He puffed in a languid way, and when he perceived that the young baggage master was looking curiously at him, he raised the white gloved hand as if to point at Arthur, but, instead of doing so, crooked the forefinger several times in solemn succession.

"He is beckoning me to go over to him," said the youth, amused at the coolness of the proceeding. "I think if he is anxious for an interview I will let him come to me."

He turned about to continue his walk, when the whistling was renewed more vigorously than before. Just a trifle impatient, Arthur looked back again, and observed that instead of crooking his finger, the fellow was using his whole arm. Extending the gloved hand, he jerked it toward his face, accompanying it with a backward flirt of the head, which threatened to tumble the beautiful tile into the dust.

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Arthur the next moment; "it's Roorback Johnson."

The discovery that it was his old friend dissipated what resentment the youth might have felt at being summoned by him as though he were a servant, and he turned about and joined him.

"Why, Roorback, I never suspected it was *you*," said Arthur, with a laugh, stepping up beside him.

"What do you tink ob 'em, Artie?"

"What do I think of *what?*"

"Dis soot."

"It fairly blinds me," replied Arthur, pretending to shade his eyes against the luster of the display.

"It's my weddin' soot," added Roorback, lowering his voice to a confidential tone.

"If that is so, you ought to keep it until that occasion."

"Dat's all right, Artie; it was Miss Scrugg's idee dat I should go on p'rade wid 'em, jes to let de oder gals see what a big prize she hab drawed—hab a cigar, Artie?"

"No, thanks, I don't smoke."

"Orter larn; neber had so much enj'yment in all my life—been sick 'leben times."

"If that's the enjoyment it gives you, I don't want any; but I saw you beckoning to me; have you anything special to say?"

"Sh'd say I had—mighty 'portant, but it won't do to talk heah," he added, looking furtively around; "we'll hab to hunt up some obcluded place."

"If we talk low, no one will hear us; I am on my way home, and we can soon reach the open country."

Roorback accepted the suggestion on condition that his friend would accompany him on a circuit through the town, so that the display of his wedding suit should lose none of the effect intended. Arthur had no cause for declining, and the detour

was made to the delight of Roorback, who swung his cane, puffed his cigar, and peeped with his one eye from under his tilted hat, at the colored damsels whom he encountered on the way. It was his share in the reward received by Arthur the previous year that enabled him to indulge in this performance, which gave him more delight than can be imagined.

In turning a corner, three colored persons were observed, on the other side of the street, discussing the political situation. One of them was rather advanced in years, but his arguments were accompanied by the most vigorous gesture and loudest tones. He was attired in humble clothing, most of the rim being gone from his straw hat, while his trousers were held in place by a single suspender skewered in front with a tenpenny nail.

He was in the midst of an eloquent sentence with his right hand raised, when one of the debaters abruptly checked him by catching his arm and pointing across the street, with the exclamation:

"Look ober dar! what am dat?"

The old gentleman turned his head and stared for a moment through his spectacles, as though in doubt of the nature of what he saw. Then he began shaking with laughter.

"Dat's my nephew, Roorback Jonsing! I orter be proud ob him, but I ain't. Halloo, Roorback! Come ober heah!"

Arthur Helmuth looked sideways at his com-

panion, who strode forward, swinging his cane and showing no evidence that he heard the hail, which was in a voice sufficiently loud to reach a point three times as far off.

"Roorback," said Arthur, "don't you hear your uncle calling you from the other side of the street?"

"I haben't any uncle, Artie!"

"What's that?"

"I haben't any when *I hab my weddin' soot on.*"

"Ah, I understand," laughed the other, whose innate love of fun gave him great entertainment over the exhibition made by his sable companion, who appeared to grow taller as he advanced.

The elderly relative from the other side of the street, finding his call disregarded, contented himself with laughter, until he looked as if he were in danger of shaking to pieces, when he faced about to resume the thread of the political discussion that had been broken in upon by his nephew's advent.

Arthur Helmuth naturally felt some curiosity to learn Roorback's business with him. He recalled that night during the preceding year, when he had accosted him somewhat similarly and imparted news which proved of the highest value.

Could it be that he had anything of the kind to tell him now? Impossible, and yet it was not likely that he would summon him from one side of the street to the other, for the sole purpose of having him admire his suit of clothes.

Ere long the two emerged from the town, and, striking the main highway, which had long been so familiar to the young baggage master that he could have walked over it with his eyes closed, they continued their stroll in the direction of Arthur's home.

It was yet early in the forenoon, the air was crisp and cool, and the sun was shining from a sky that had hardly a cloud in it. Arthur's bounding health, and the knowledge that President Ketcham held him in as high regard as ever, together with the fact that he would be able to spend several hours with his mother, drove everything like gloom from his heart.

"Roorback," said he, when they were fairly outside of the town, "did you call me across the street for anything else than to admire your clothing?"

"Why, Artie!" exclaimed his companion, stopping short and looking reproachfully at him; "do you s'pose dat I am such a despisable gentleman as dat?"

"If you had any other business, there can be no better time to make it known than the present," replied Arthur, continuing his walk.

Roorback glanced in every direction, before quickening his pace so as to place himself beside his friend.

"We'll wait till *he* gots by," he said, in a guarded undertone, referring to a farmer who was slowly approaching with his team from the rear and was fully two hundred yards distant.

Arthur laughed.

"It must be tremendously important that you have to protect it so well. Since that old fellow's horses are walking no faster than we, we shall have to stop or he never will pass us."

"Dat am a good idee."

The suggestion was adopted, and, by and by, the farmer was far enough in advance for Roorback to deem it safe to speak.

CHAPTER XX.

A PROPOSITION.

"I S'POSE you hab heerd 'bout de bank bein' robbed at New Center?" was the rather startling remark with which Roorback Johnson opened business.

"That is known throughout the whole country by this time, though I learned nothing of it until I reached Beavertown this morning."

"Ain't it orful?"

"Well, yes, but I have heard of 'orfuller' things. There was only one man hurt, though considerable money was taken."

"What I war gettin' at," continued Roorback, setting his hat straight on his head, now that there was no admiration he cared to arouse, "am dis; I wants to go into partnership wid yer."

Arthur Helmuth was so astonished that he looked at his companion without attempting to reply to his remark.

"I mean it, Artie," he added, with a shake of his head; "I s'pose you know dat dere's been a million dollars reward offered for de capture ob dat money dat was stole."

"I did not know that the sum was as large as *that;* my impression was that it was five thousand."

"Wal, ain't five tousand dollars as big a sum to a colored gemman as a million am?"

"Possibly it is, for one is about as impossible of attainment as the other. We had pretty good luck in the other case, but there are no reasons to hope for anything of the kind now."

"Why not?"

"Why not?" repeated the surprised Arthur; "for the reason that they don't exist. It was a piece of good luck in the other case. In the first place, since you have sported around so much in your fine clothes, there isn't any girl to be found who will ask your rival to throw you out of doors. Then, I haven't had a chance to see the robbers' faces, and they haven't hidden the plunder in the Big Woods."

"Dat may be all so, and it am lucky dat tings ain't as dey war when old Wonzell got it under de ear."

"And why, pray?"

"'Cause eberybody would be in de job and dere would be so many to diwide de purceeds among dat de five tousand dollars wouldn't go round."

"Then as I understand it, Roorback, you wish us to join forces in the hunt for these men who robbed the bank, and for the plunder they took away, with the agreement that the reward secured shall be divided equally between us."

Young Helmuth made this suppositional state-

ment with the gravity of a judge on the bench, but at the same time he was on the point of exploding with laughter. There was something so deliciously absurd in the proposition that it required all his self restraint not to hurt the feelings of his friend by breaking into uncontrollable mirth.

It was apparent that Roorback's success in the Wonzell case had made it necessary for him to buy a larger hat than he was accustomed to wear. Upon no other theory can his ideas be understood. He could not be made to see the truth which his more intelligent friend tried to fix in his mind, namely, that the manner by which he earned a part of the reward offered, and indeed by which both gained it, was an accident so pure and simple that it could not be repeated.

He recalled that young Helmuth had been generous in his treatment of him. There was nothing ungrateful or mean in his own make up, and he proposed now to reciprocate by inviting the other to join him in his enterprise. He had already formed his plans, or a portion of them, and was quite willing to admit the young man on the ground floor.

Arthur, by his remark quoted, put the whole matter in such clear shape that Roorback saw no way of improving it.

"Dat's just de size ob it," he said, so pleased with the quickness of his friend in catching on, that he unconsciously inserted the lighted end of the

cigar in his mouth. He discovered his mistake, however, very quickly, and hastily corrected it.

"Well, Roorback," added young Helmuth, pleasantly, "I appreciate your kindness, and would be glad to do you any turn in my power, but the partnership you are talking about lacks the necessary capital back of it."

The African's silent stare showed he failed to grasp the remark, observing which, Arthur added:

"I mean that neither of us knows enough about the crime for the knowledge to be of any joint use to us."

"Ob course, but we am agwine to know a mighty good deal before we're more'n about a week older," said Roorback, emphatically; "*dat's* de idee."

"Have you any plan in mind?"

"Hundreds ob 'em," was the confident response.

"Please explain your leading one to me."

"Dey're so warious dat I don't know which one will suit you best, but one ob 'em am to hunt round till we find de chap dat took de money away in de trunk; den we'll coax him off in de woods, down him, and choke him till he'll hab to tell or die.'

Arthur observed the earnest expression on the face of Roorback, and his own was equally serious. He bent his head, as if in deep thought, and removing his cap, gently scratched his crown, as a person is inclined to do when puzzled over something.

"Excuse me, Roorback, but there is so much in

that, I shall have to lean on the fence while I turn it around in my mind."

"Sartinly;" and to show his sympathy, the colored youth rested one elbow on the rail at the side of the highway, and, supporting the weight of his body on one foot, looked wistfully in the countenance of the young man, in whom he reposed so much trust. Not the shadow of a smile played about Arthur's mouth as he asked:

"We would have to get the fellow off in the woods, where no one could hear him when he yelled for help; what excuse could we make, so he would not be suspicious?"

"We mought tell him dat dere was a circus in de woods, and if he went along wid us, we'd take him in for nuffin; he would jump at dat chance, for I know *I* would."

"But it seems to me they don't have circuses in the woods, and he would think we were deceiving him."

"Den we could tell him dat his grandmother war out dere, and wanted to see him on 'portant bus'ness."

"Suppose it should turn out that his grandmother was dead?"

Roorback removed his glossy tile and passed his gloved hand through his hair.

"Dat mought be so; we mustn't forget all dem tings; golly, Artie, you ain't a fool, am you?"

The absolute innocence of the question gave

Arthur an excuse for yielding to that which he could not restrain a minute longer. He threw back his head and laughed until he was obliged to cling to the fence to keep from falling. Roorback, without suspecting the real cause of his mirth, smiled in sympathy, and hastened to explain:

"I didn't mean by dat, Artie, dat *I* eber tinked you war a fool, or dat I eber heard anybody else say you war; if you've got dat idee, I hope you'll oxcoos me."

"It's all right," replied the youth, straightening his face, and adding:

"I see another objection to your plan."

"What's dat?" asked Roorback, eagerly.

"How are we going to find the guilty party? *There's* the whole trouble; the minute the officers can find him, he will be arrested."

"I understands dat," replied the colored youth, shaking his head significantly; "I hab tought it all out."

"Let me hear," said Arthur, assuming an expression as though expecting momentous tidings.

"I can tell him de minute I sot eyes on him; dere's sumfin in his looks dat will gib him away, dat is, to *me*, dough de perlice can't get onto it."

"Well, Roorback, find the man and let me know; then we will arrange our other plans. If we only knew where that trunk is——"

Roorback Johnson was standing with both elbows on the top rail of the fence, his back press-

ing lightly against the same rail, and his face turned away. The heel of his right shoe rested on the lowermost rail, and he was idly swinging his big cane in his right hand. Somehow or other the hat had tilted over one eye again, the burning end of the cigar pointed toward the zenith, and Roorback was the same irresistible dude as before.

Looking straight into the amused face of Arthur Helmuth, he said:

"*Artie, I knows whar dat trunk am!*"

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT ROORBACK JOHNSON SAW.

ABOUT this time it began to dawn upon Arthur Helmuth that Roorback was not such a zany as he appeared to be. He had something worth telling after all.

Before the astounded youth had time to make any comment on the declaration of the African that he could tell where the missing trunk was, Roorback added, with another of his matchless grins, which displayed his superb teeth:

"I'm tellin' you de troof, Artie, but afore I done so, I tought I would sound you; if you had laughed at me an' treated me ugly, I neber would hab tole yer, but you acted de gemman dat you allers war; when I larned all 'bout de trunk, de fust ting dat come into my head war to tell *you*, 'cause you allers treated me so kind in school, so I started down to de station to see you when you went frough on de train."

"But you were too late for the train," Arthur managed to interject; "it had been gone some time."

"I was dere an' seed you go into de pres'dent's office; I sauntered up town, so de colored ladies shouldn't miss seein' my soot, an' I war just gwine back to look for you when I observed you walkin' on de oder side ob de street."

Arthur Helmuth's conscience pricked him just a little. True, he had kept a grave countenance throughout this remarkable interview, but it was not because he failed to see the absurdity of every proposition of the colored youth. He had played his own part for the purpose of drawing the other on into still greater depths; but his self-reproof was lightened by the knowledge that Roorback himself was also acting a part.

His bewildering proposals were not in earnest. He merely sought to expose himself to the ridicule of the bright young man, as a test of his feelings toward him. The result was satisfactory: Arthur was the same gentleman he had always shown himself to be; Roorback, therefore, would let him in on the "ground floor."

"But," said young Helmuth, his earnestness by no means feigned this time, "let me hear about the missing trunk; if you can locate it, your knowledge is valuable indeed."

"Yesterday arternoon," began Roorback, adjusting his hat at a better angle on his head, "I come down toward de station meanin' to meet your train."

"Did you intend to go away?"

"No," replied the African, with another grin; "when I puts on my weddin' soots it means dat I'm to take a ride with Miss Scruggs dat am to be, or I'm gwine to place myself near de station so dat de folks comin' from de train shall hab a chance to admire dem goods. Yesterday I was hindered so much on de way dat I arrove a little late. I war takin' tings easy when I seed a man come out ob de station and turn to de right by de bridge."

"What led you to notice him particularly?"

"He was carrying a small trunk by de handle."

"What sort of trunk was it? Describe it, if you please."

"It war small, an' had lots of shiny brass nails dat looked like tousands ob eyes peepin' at you. But it warn't *dat* alone dat led me to notice de man."

"Ah, what else?" asked Arthur, making no attempt to repress his curiosity.

"Jes' as I took a good look at de trunk, it wanished!"

"Roorback, what do you mean!" sternly demanded Arthur.

"Hold on—don't be too obscrupulous," replied his friend, enjoying the telling of what was certainly a remarkable story; "I'm giben it to you straight, Artie; I had got only a fair look at de man when anoder chap stepped up, an', stoopin' ober quick, grabbed de trunk by de oder handle. Like a wink

he flung it into a carriage standin' near, bofe jumped in after it an' druv off like mad."

"Did you gain a look at the faces of the two men?"

"I seed only de one dat brought de trunk from de station; de oder had his back to me, so I hadn't a chance ob seein' how he looked, an' you know it war clus to night."

"Describe the man whom you *did* see."

"I remember he war well dressed, had black side whiskers an' mustache, an' wore a hat like mine, dough it didn't shine as much."

There could be no doubt in Arthur's mind that Roorback was telling the truth; the individual whom he saw was the one to whom he himself had surrendered the trunk, on the presentation of the proper check, at Beavertown station. The description, though not very full, was sufficiently clear to prove that.

"And you saw them drive off?"

"I reckon I did."

"What direction did they take?"

"Dey crossed de bridge and headed out dis way into de kentry."

"But they were going so fast you couldn't follow them, so you haven't very definite knowledge, after all."

"Dere you go agin! I didn't try to foller 'em; I stayed down town an' den started for home. By dat time it war dark, but I seed 'em again."

HOW ARE WE GOING TO FIND THE GUILTY PARTY?

"When and where?"

"Jes' as I war passin' de Big Woods, where you found de money dat was stole from old Wonzell, I seed de carriage standin' at de side ob de road; I knowed it at once, an' I slipped behind a tree. I didn't wait long when de same man, as I tink it was, dough it was too dark to see him plain, climbed ober de fence, got into de carriage, an' dey came drivin' back as mad as before. I tried to get a look at em' as dey passed me, but it was too dark, an' all dat I could tell for sartin war dat dere war two ob 'em. *Dat's* all I know."

Arthur was impressed by the words of his colored friend, for, as has been said, he was convinced that every one was true. That it had fallen to his lot again, by a singular coincidence, to witness the movements of two parties, connected more or less directly with the bank burglary, was certain. It looked as if fate had ordered that this simple-hearted youth should have a hand once more in righting a great wrong which the community had suffered.

Recalling the question he had put to Roorback under similar circumstances, Arthur repeated it:

"Have you told this to any one beside me?"

"I hab not; I remembered dat you was partic'lar dat I shouldn't do so, when we war huntin' old Wonzell's money, an' I hab kept my mouf shet; dat's what I'm gwine to do wid all de robberies dat we hab each year after dis."

Arthur smiled at the seriousness of the remark,

and the two resumed their walk in the direction of the former's home, still discussing in cautious tones the all absorbing question.

The singular discovery that had come to young Helmuth's knowledge was gratifying in one sense, but the opposite in another, for it added to rather than lessened the mystery that met him at every turn. With all his brightness and ingenuity, he could form no explanation of the course of the men in carrying off the trunk. It bore an air of bravado for which no justification could be suggested.

Since Roorback had observed their actions, it would seem impossible that others had not done the same. The transfer of the trunk to the carriage was made so publicly that one of the strangest features of the business thus far was that no one else had been found who observed it. Diligent inquiry must bring witnesses to light.

As to what had become of the parties after their return to Beavertown, supposing they drove thither, Roorback possessed no information. The companion of the person who claimed and received the trunk probably hired the carriage and returned it to the owner. No great skill was necessary on the part of the two to mislead all suspicion not directed toward them when in company.

The indications were that the missing trunk had been traced to the Big Woods, in which French Dick and Shorty Wales supposed they had safely hidden Jared Wonzell's money, but the search was

not narrowed sufficiently to give hope that it could be traced to the hiding-place without more help.

Arthur again warned his companion against dropping a hint to any one without first gaining his consent, and, bidding him good-bye, entered the gate leading to his own home.

CHAPTER XXII.

A CHANGE OF QUARTERS.

ONE of the commendable traits of President Ketcham, of the H. & N. C. Railway, was the interest he showed in his employees. While he was quick to punish negligence, indifference and carelessness, he was equally prompt in rewarding loyalty and intelligence. He frequently passed over the length of his road, and was personally acquainted with or knew by sight every one of his servants from the superintendent down to the brakeman on the freight and coal trains.

Superintendent Calkins was a devoted officer of the company, which was fast increasing in wealth, as the surrounding country was developed, but his interest in the men was less personal than the president's. When the former officer received the report of Engineer Ledwith's strange error in running several miles upon the wrong track, he ordered his peremptory discharge, for in his eyes no fault could have been more unpardonable. The superintendent's view could not be questioned; the safety of the passengers intrusting themselves to the care

of the company should stand above every other consideration.

President Ketcham indorsed this sound doctrine, but he was more thoughtful in enforcing it. Ledwith was one of their best and oldest engineers, and, before consenting to his discharge, he sent for him and listened to his explanation.

This investigation brought out a fact known to no other save the engineer. He had not slept a half hour for the preceding three nights. Ledwith was unmarried, not because he did not love a virtuous and comely lass, but because he had an invalid mother and idiotic sister, wholly depending upon him for their bread and care. To save the feelings of his parent, whose heart was wrapped up in the unfortunate child, Tom employed a nurse to look after the sister, instead of sending her to a charitable institution. After doing this, he found no surplus in his treasury that justified him in thinking of marriage. His mother was in the last stages of consumption, and in order to relieve the nurse, the affectionate son and brother took his place by the sick one's bedside at the earliest possible moment.

There had not been a night for four years or more a portion of which was not spent with her, and during her critically low condition, from which she had slightly rallied, he never closed his eyes for a minute when with her, only catching a brief nap after daylight, before hurrying off to take charge of his locomotive.

A peculiarity of Tom Ledwith was that he kept all these matters to himself. His fireman knew very little of the affliction in the engineer's family, and no word would have gone to the ears of President Ketcham, had not the good fellow in sheer desperation, to save himself from dismissal, told the simple, touching truth.

Although he seemed to be awake as he sat in his cab on that memorable night, and although he was himself a part of the time, he was dazed by his terrible need of slumber, and doubtless went through many of his duties in a purely mechanical way, as a man will sometimes keep his saddle when unconscious.

"I must condemn you," said the president, "for you did a grave wrong; you should have asked for a week or more off, for you had no right to attempt to do that which you lack the power to do, thus imperiling the lives of many others; to me it was so incomprehensible that you should make such a blunder that I suspected there was something behind it less creditable to you than I find. You did your duty so well that no distrust was awakened among those around you, though in fact you were asleep and unable to comprehend things. Your fireman has not your excuse, though he cannot be held responsible for what occurred.

"After this, Tom," added the president, rising to his feet, "when you are needed at home, give us as much notice as you can and *stay there*. I'll

promise that you shall not be docked a penny of your wages. Good-bye."

There was a tremor in the voice of the head officer of the H. & N. C. Railway and he blinked suspiciously. He offered his hand to the grateful engineer, who felt something in the palm, which on being examined when he reached the outside proved to be a twenty dollar bill.

It was by such thoughtfulness that President Ketcham won the love of every employee on his road and rendered the occurrence of a strike impossible.

Just now he was particularly interested in Dolph Ashland, telegraphist at Ardvale, the lonely, insignificant station in the woods, some twenty miles west of Beavertown. He had stopped off to see him several times since his location there, and despite the fellow's effeminacy and boyish appearance, found much to like in him.

It would be hard to say precisely what it was. Perhaps it was his unfailing good nature, his quaint waggishness, for he was the most solemn fellow in the world when telling a joke; his philosophy; his impudence; his frankness in saying to a man's face precisely what he would say behind his back, or more likely it was a combination of all these and still other qualities.

During President Ketcham's calls upon Dolph he found he possessed an exceptionally fine education. Among his few treasures at the station were

several volumes upon the most scientific and abstruse subjects, whose appearance showed they were often handled by their owner.

One of the principal rules displayed at the station positively forbade the men to smoke within their offices, and yet, during his first interview with the president Dolph sat with his feet on his own desk smoking his huge brierwood pipe.

When the president inquired whether there were any improvments he desired to suggest in his quarters, the young man, without a smile, asked him whether it would not be a good idea to carpet the floor with Axminster and provide the waiting room with a grand piano.

"Sometimes the trains are late," he added, with the same grave countenance, "and it would amuse the farmers and their wives to thump on the piano while waiting. I could turn over the case for the main station and let this serve for an annex."

Mr. Ketcham thought it his duty to reprove Ashland for his frivolity, whereupon the other insisted that he was in earnest. He complained, too, that his oil lamp gave such a poor light that it affected his eyes, and he submitted a diagram by which a gas pipe could be extended along the track from Hurvan eighteen miles to Ardvale.

The traits named cannot be considered as commendable ones in an employee, and there are not many employers who would permit much play to them in a clerk. President Ketcham did not allow

Ashland to see that he viewed his manners with indulgence, but it was a fact nevertheless, as I have stated, that he was attracted toward the young man, and, without the suspicion of the latter, he set an investigation on foot which brought to light the truth that he was unusually well educated, belonged to an excellent family, and, so far as could be known possessed an integrity without a stain. He was a brilliant performer on the piano, wrote a hand like copperplate, had no superior as a telegraphist and was an expert pistol shot.

And yet, despite these and other accomplishments, Ashland seemed content to keep his place at the little, box-like office in the depths of the woods, occasionally selling a ticket to some farmer, who straggled out of the wilderness with an ambition to take a peep at civilization, and looking after the business of the company.

President Ketcham gave no hint of his purpose to Ashland, but, for some weeks before the bank burglary, he was inclined to give him a better situation. He saw how useful he would be in any place, and the delay was in order to fix upon the best location for him.

Ashland's affray with French Dick and Shorty Wales seemed to bring matters to a climax. The president was pleased more than he would admit with the coolness and nerve shown by the operator. Almost any other person in his situation would have surrendered the telegram when demanded, and

he could hardly have been censured for doing so; but here was a young man, who risked his life for what after all was no very important principle. Not only that, but he drove an armed desperado twice his size from his office at the point of the pistol, and then, through his courage and self-possession, aided in the capture of both the convicts.

"A man who can do all *that*," thought the president, "has the genuine stuff in him; I need him; and right here is the spot where I want him more then anywhere else."

On the day succeeding the capture of the convicts, Ashland received word over the wires that President Ketcham wished him to come to Beavertown and assume duty in his office. A liberal increase in pay was assured, and the president inquired how long a time he needed to make his preparations for removal. Dolph ticked back that he thought he could do it in two minutes, but if it would be any accommodation to the president, he would try to shorten the period by a few seconds.

Ignoring the jest of the youth (as the dignity of his office required), Mr. Ketcham notified Ashland that Mr. Charles R. Hunter, from the office at New Center, would arrive at Ardvale, by the Accommodation line with authority to assume charge of the office. Mr. Ashland was directed to turn over the effects to him, and was requested to give him all necessary instructions as to the duties of the office.

When all that should have been done was finished, Ashland was ordered to report to the President at Beavertown.

An hour after the arrival of Mr. King at Ardvale, Ashland telegraphed the president that he had found the young man such an apt pupil, that he had graduated and conferred upon him a diploma, certifying that he was fully competent to run the Ardvale office, whose requirements in reality would not tax a child twelve years old.

Toward evening, on the same day of these little incidents, Dolph reported at the office of President Ketcham, ready for duty.

The young telegraph operator possessed tact. He did not need to be reminded that the style of Ardvale would not answer for Beavertown. He was attired in his best suit, which became him well, and, if he carried his favorite brierwood pipe into the president's office, it was so concealed and covered up that not the faintest odor was emitted.

Ashland assumed his more responsible duties, neither he nor any one else dreaming of the striking manner in which the step was to involve him in the incidents I have set out to relate.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Q. Z. Z."

DOLPH ASHLAND speedily became a favorite among those whom he saw while in the president's office. Mr. Ketcham found him all that he expected, and in reality more. He seemed to grasp the duties of his office intuitively, and, within a brief time, was as much at home as though he had been employed there for weeks.

The president expected to find it necessary to give him a plain talking to, the text being the fact that the manners of Ardvale would not answer for Beavertown; but the necessity never arose. As I have already stated, Dolph possessed the tact to recognize the logic of events. No one dressed with better taste than he, and, whatever smoking he did took place outside the building in which the president had his office.

His quaint humor, his owlish waggishness, his good nature and his philosophy remained, for they were a part of his being. When to these were added the facts that he always had considerable funds at command and willingly loaned or gave

them to those in need, enough had been said to explain his popularity.

It must be said, however, that there was one exception among those who took kindly to Ashland. Isaac Garrity had been the only operator in President Ketcham's office for two years, serving most of the time as his private secretary. He often accompanied the gentleman on his trips over the line, his official situation giving him an *entrée* into what may be called the inner circle, whenever and wherever he chose to present himself. He spent a good deal of his time at New Center, where the main offices, including that of the superintendent, were located.

Garrity was about thirty years of age, and was the son of a college associate of the president, who, dying some years previous, had begged Mr. Ketcham to interest himself in the young man's welfare. The latter was attentive to business, doing his work so methodically and well, that no criticism could be made upon it. His only possible fault was his habit of absenting himself at times without permission. The suspicion was general that he had become interested in a young lady in New Center, and the president was disposed to be indulgent to him. Still, as he needed some one continually in his office, and the assistant was not always reliable, the dereliction of Garrity gave good cause for bringing Ashland to Beavertown and placing him alongside the older operator.

President Kotcham took pains to impress upon the two that they were associates, with equal rank and subordination only to him. He expressed the hope that they would get along without friction, but gave them to understand that if they did not, the one in fault should be dismissed without warning.

"If *both* are blamable, then both shall go; you will find me considerate," he said, "but at the same time *just*."

"I am sure we shall get along well," replied Garrity, warmly shaking the hand of Ashland, who in his solemn way said:

"We are twins from this time henceforth and forever."

The penetration of the younger, however, told him that the welcome of the other was insincere. Ashland felt no ill will toward the other. More than that, he was charitable and saw nothing censurable in the feeling of Garrity, who could not avoid looking upon his coming with jealousy, the end of which might be his own displacement from the office.

"I will be just to him," thought Dolph, "and he has only to be half as considerate toward me."

In the presence of the president, Garrity was courteous to his associate, who avoided the mistake of overdoing his part. He "caught on" with a readiness that surprised the elder, and, when the latter was absent, did his work thoroughly and

without complaint, even though he knew the president was unaware of the neglect of the other.

"A fellow isn't responsible when he is in love," was the thought of Ashland, "and we must give him charity. One of these days I will capture some heiress and will need indulgence; but, all the same, I don't believe I shall get an overdose in *this* office."

"How are you getting along?" asked the president, shortly after Ashland assumed his new duties, and while Garrity was absent at lunch.

"If *you* are satisfied," replied Ashland, "I am sure *I* am."

"I have no fault to find with the work of yourself and Mr. Garrity; both of you seem to be attentive, and no complaint has reached me from any quarter. I have complimented Mr. Garrity on his clever work of last evening. He had a good many dispatches to get through to New Center, where I was called on business in connection with the bank burglary; but he did it promptly and without an error. In fact, your presence seems to have spurred him up," added Mr. Ketcham, with a smile.

"I can hardly agree with you," replied Dolph, saying nothing more, though, had he told the whole truth, he would have added that his associate left the office the preceding afternoon, and did not show up until the next day. The work which Mr. Ketcham complimented as that of the elder, was done by the younger. It was evident, however,

that the president was never to learn the fact from the one entitled to the credit.

Mr. Ketcham remained near the instrument several minutes longer, rather wishing that Dolph would utter some of his quaint remarks. Almost any one else would have seized the chance to cultivate the good will of his employer, but Ashland showed no desire to do so. In fact, there was considerable work on hand just then, and he gave more attention to it than to the president, who withdrew shortly after to his private office, wondering at and yet admiring the peculiar fellow.

Some minutes later Garrity returned, and Ashland, taking up his hat, went out to his lunch, which consisted of a small sandwich and a big smoke. He had hardly left the building when the president came back into the apartment, where the telegraph instruments kept up their ceaseless clicking.

"Isaac," said he, seating himself at the operator's elbow, "there seems to be no business requiring your special attention just now, and I would like a few words with you."

"Certainly, sir; I am always at your service," replied the operator, turning his chair so as to face his employer.

"I want to know what you think of Ashland."

"He is a very expert operator and attends closely to business," was the prompt and hearty reply.

"You and he have had no trouble?"

"Mercy! not a whisper. Why do you ask?"

"Is there anything peculiar in his actions?"

"I do not understand you," said Garrity, his countenance flushing slightly, as he looked curiously into the face of the president.

"Have you noticed any personal dispatches coming to him?"

The operator was silent a moment, and then said:

"I hope you will not press that question, Mr. Ketcham."

"But I *do* press it, and I have the right. You are aware that there have been some strange goings on during the past few days along our line; we are doing all we can to discover their meaning, and are obliged to look for evidence in every quarter. It is your duty to help us in so far as you can."

"Since you put it in that way, I must say that there *is* a mystery about Ashland which I don't understand."

"Explain."

"He had hardly taken his place at the desk on my left, when a curious message came to him from New Center."

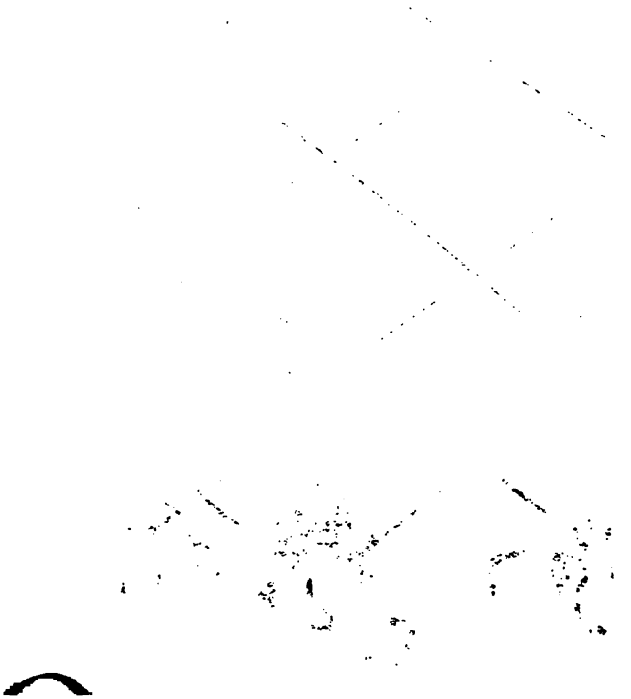
"Can you recall it?"

"I caught it as it went over the wire, and, that there might be no mistake, jotted it down on the back of this envelope. Here it is—perhaps you can understand it."

He drew a folded piece of envelope from his

pocket-book and passed it to the president, who unfolded it and read:

"*Keep an eye on the freight; the coal has tumbled; trying the passenger; most money in freight, however.* *Q. Z. Z.*"



CHAPTER XXIV.

STRANGE "FREIGHT."

PRESIDENT KETCHAM held the curious telegram in his hand for several minutes, studying the words whose meaning was beyond his power to fathom. That they possessed a significance beneath their apparent innocence was too evident to be questioned.

"Isaac," said he, looking up in the face of his operator, whose eyes were fixed on him, "what do you make of it?"

"I can form no idea."

"But you have a suspicion?"

"A suspicion is as likely to be wrong as right."

"Nevertheless, I insist you shall tell it."

Garrity was silent a moment, fidgeting with the papers on his desk, loath to speak, but he knew his chief's eyes were on him, and he was impatient.

"Well, Mr. Ketcham, since you compel me, I will say that I believe Ashland knows more about the bank burglary and the duplicate check than is consistent with his innocence. That is not the only message he has received from New Center."

"Did you note down any others?"

"Only one; here it is."

This time he drew a folded telegram blank from the same pocket-book and handed it to the president. It read:

"*The profit is in the freight.—Q. Z. Z.*"

"You have heard others which you did not transcribe?" was the inquiring remark of the president.

"Only a couple, and the signature was the same —'*Q. Z. Z.*'"

"And their import?"

"Was substantially that the so-called 'freight' was the particular branch of railroading to which Ashland was to give his attention. You must bear in mind," added Garrity, "that he has many chances for sending and receiving messages unknown to me."

"Have you heard him send any?"

"Yesterday he replied to 'Q. Z. Z.,' merely saying, 'All right.'"

"And how did he sign his dispatch?"

"With his initials 'A. A.'"

"Well," said President Ketcham, with a sigh, "a man doesn't know whom to trust in these times. I have had my misgivings awakened toward others in whom I placed the fullest confidence. I can only warn you to keep your eyes and ears open. It may be that Ashland is mixed up in this business, though I did not dream of it until after

you told me. Have you learned anything while away?"

"Nothing of importance."

The question and reply showed that President Ketcham was not ignorant of Garrity's absence at times, though he had no knowledge of the extent to which the other took advantage of his request to follow up several supposed clews. The elder operator was doing his best to unravel the tangled thread, to which so many persons were giving their efforts at this time.

Mr. Ketcham withdrew to his private room, more uncomfortable than ever. Detective Cinch had disturbed his faith in Arthur Helmuth, and now he was forced to doubt the loyalty of the young man whom he had promoted from Ardvale and whose ability he admired.

"Mr. Garrity may not be so pleasing in his ways," he reflected, "but I can safely believe in him. He knows my wishes and needs not to be urged to keep a close watch of Ashland. I must acquaint Cinch with the new turn affairs have taken."

Meanwhile, Dolph Ashland, all unsuspicious of the little scene in the president's office, had entered the restaurant near the station and was calmly munching a sandwich and sipping a glass of milk beside his plate. He was perched on a high stool at the counter, where a dozen other persons were bolting their midday meal in true American style.

At his elbow, sat a well-dressed, middle-aged man in spectacles devouring a goodly piece of apple pie. Neither he nor Ashland seemed to be aware for some minutes of each other's presence, but had any one taken the pains to watch them closely, he would have discovered that they exchanged an occasional word without looking at each other, and in tones so low that the nearest persons could not hear what was said.

"Sure it's the freight?"

This inquiring remark was made by Ashland, as he separated the two pieces of bread, and reached for the mustard with which to smear the shaving of ham.

The middle-aged gentleman at his elbow, although his mouth was full of the national delicacy, managed to reply in the same guarded manner:

"Ain't sure, but it looks that way; I've got an eye on it and you must do the same."

"That's what I'm doing."

"Learned anything?"

"Not of account; better not send any more messages unless you have to."

"Why not?"

"My pardner acts suspicious."

"All right; I'll remember."

Ashland, having finished his simple meal, slid from the high chair, without noticing the other, walked to the desk where, having paid for his lunch,

he filled and lit his pipe, and then sauntered outside, puffing in the leisurely manner of the confirmed smoker.

A minute later, the middle-aged individual, having finished his more substantial meal, followed in the footsteps of Ashland, first lighting a cigar, which he held in one hand, while he employed a toothpick with the other, as he walked slowly out doors, and in the most natural manner, stopped beside the young man, who was smoking his strong brierwood.

Although each must have been aware of the presence of the other at his elbow, he seemed not to know it. Ashland was looking down street with the absent stare of one who sees nothing, while his wits are wool-gathering.

But the elder was all vigilance. The eyes behind the green spectacles missed nothing. He darted a quick glance at every person passing near, and noted little occurrences on the street, which no one else observed. He acted as if he feared some detective was in the vicinity, searching for him.

All at once he began smoking vigorously at his cigar. The fire was so low that the effort was to prevent it going out, but all the same the little puffs of vapor grew less and less until they ceased altogether.

"Confound it," he muttered, removing the weed from his mouth and looking reproachfully at it, "that cigar isn't of much account."

By this time, several persons had gathered near, and he glanced from one to the other, as if debating which to ask for a light. Finally he fixed upon Ashland, who was still looking absently down street and puffing his pipe.

"Can you oblige me with a match, sir?"

"You'll find plenty of 'em inside," replied the operator, without stirring or removing his hands from his pockets.

"I am aware of that, sir."

"Then why bother me?"

"I took you for a gentleman," said the other warmly, "but beg pardon for my mistake."

"That's all right," replied Ashland in his imperturbable manner; "mistakes will happen."

The other glared at him, as if trying to think of some remark that would crush the effeminate fellow; but, unable to do so, he stepped angrily inside, relit his cigar and came forth with the stride of an angry man.

"Here," he said, his eyes snapping behind his spectacles, as he extended a couple of matches wrapped in a piece of paper; "you may need them."

Ashland looked at the tiny package, as if he did not quite understand the proceeding. Then he reached out, and, taking it, shoved the matches into his vest pocket without a word of acknowledgment.

"I wrapped them up for you," added the donor,

"for otherwise you are such a bright youth you would be likely to touch them off."

"That's so," responded Dolph, lounging off toward the station, while the indignant gentleman stared wrathfully after him and remarked to several bystanders:

"If any more unmannerly dude can be produced in this country, I'll give a prize for him."

When certain he was alone, Dolph Ashland slipped the forefinger of one hand into his vest pocket, and deftly fished out the bit of paper, in which the lucifers were wrapped. A glance at the hastily scrawled words in pencil, showed the following:

"*I believe we are both watched; you cannot be too careful; look for me each day at lunch; will not use the telegraph, if it can be avoided; don't forget the freight.*"

Although this communication was not addressed nor signed, there could be no doubt that the writer was "Q. Z. Z." the sender of the cipher messages to Adolph Ashland.

CHAPTER XXV.

A TEMPTING PROPOSITION.

AMID all his doubts, distrust, and misgivings, there was one person to whom Arthur Helmuth went with a confidence that nothing in the world could lessen.

Having parted with Roorback Johnson and his gaudy costume, he opened the gate in front of his home, and a minute later caught his mother in his arms, who, delighted to see him, inquired how it was he was permitted to make her a visit during business hours.

The two were alone, and with no fear of interruption. The son threw himself on the lounge in the sitting-room, and told her everything about the bank burglary which she had already learned, including his experience with the duplicate baggage check, and the request of President Ketcham that he should give his help in solving the problem.

This was followed by the interesting narrative of Roorback Johnson.

"That reward last year came in very handily," added Arthur in his airy fashion, "but I don't see

much chance of adding another to it, despite Roorback's discovery and his own hopefulness."

"It would be childish for us to look for any such good fortune," calmly replied the mother, "but the strange circumstances that have brought Roorback into the affair may bear fruit."

"He has learned that the trunk which has caused so much trouble was taken to the Big Woods and no doubt hidden there; but, as was the case with Mr. Wonzell's money, other help must be had before it can be found."

"*That* isn't the most serious question."

"What is?"

"Whether it is worth finding."

"The same doubt has occurred to me, and, for a time, I suspected the movement was a blind to divert suspicion from the disposal of the real treasure, but I am inclined to believe I was mistaken. I forgot to tell you that a gentleman reported seeing a carriage with the trunk, driven furiously out of New Center, immediately after the burglary."

"In what direction?"

"Toward the country, which is more wooded there than here."

"You know, my son, that men sometimes succeed in their enterprises by displaying a daring so unexpected, that suspicion is allayed or destroyed."

"Wherein lies the application of *that* philosophy?" asked Arthur, playfully tapping his parent's cheek.

"The sending off of that small trunk which you checked at New Center may have been an instance, and yet I must confess it seems incredible that it should be."

"So it strikes me, but the trunk hidden in the Big Woods is worth investigating and it shall not be neglected."

It was well enough to form such a resolution, but the difficulty in carrying it out. Before mother and son could discuss it, they were surprised by a knock at the door. The surprise was increased, when no less a person than Jared Wonzell was admitted.

Since it was out of this miser's power to hold any monetary control over Mrs. Helmuth and her son, they felt none of the discomfort of that interview of the preceding year, when he had threatened them because of their delay in paying his claim against them.

The old fellow was all smiles and suavity, as he took the seat to which the lady invited him. Slight as was his respect for the curmudgeon, Arthur treated him courteously, and waited to learn what business led to the call.

Wonzell had spruced up more than was his wont. It was not often that Mr. Wonzell tried to be gracious, and the effort was the more marked, therefore, on that account.

If our friends were astonished to receive a call

from the old fellow, they were almost dumfounded when he made known his errand.

"Now, Arthur," said he, coming abruptly to the point, "I don't begrudge the reward you received last year for helping to get back the money stolen from me, though it was a great deal more than you ought to have taken, but——"

He paused and rubbed his hands over each other, chewing hard with his toothless gums; then, looking from the mother to son, his wrinkled face expanded into such a wide grin that it caused him to resemble another person altogether.

"Folks say I am close with my money," he continued, still rubbing his hands in and over each other, "but I have to be economical or Deborah and I would go to the poor-house, but when you come to know me better, you'll find I'm not so hard as some people say."

He paused again and repeated the previous performance, the grin, if possible, being more expansive than ever.

"If you have business with us," said Arthur, beginning to grow impatient at the conduct of the caller, "I wish you would let us know what it is, for *we* have some matters also to talk over."

"Of course, of course—I was just coming to it. You heard about the New Center Bank being robbed, didn't you?"

Parent and son nodded their heads, the former smiling, for with a woman's intuition, she suspected

the drift of things, though as yet Arthur had not the remotest idea of what impended.

"They have offered a big reward—the same as *I* paid—somebody will make a fortune out of it."

"But to do that," said the youth, "that somebody must secure the stolen money and bring about the capture of the thieves."

"You don't think it was the same men that stole *my* money?"

"It could not have been, for they were retaken and sent back to prison, before they gained the chance."

"Now," continued the caller, with his hand rubbing and grimacing, "it strikes me that you and I, Arthur, might make a good thing of this burglary."

"In what way?" was the wondering question.

"We'll divide the reward between us."

As he uttered this sentence, Jared Wonzell reached over and gave the lad a dig with his long forefinger under the arm, accompanying it with a queer, clucking sound, and a grin that literally seemed to shove his ears back to make room for it. Then the bobbing up and down of his shoulders showed he was laughing none the less heartily because it was without sound.

Arthur now grasped the situation. The old man's inordinate greed led him to think he might gain a portion of the large reward offered by the bank. Well aware that he could do nothing of himself to earn it, and recalling the success of the

young railroad man in that direction the previous year, he wished to propose a partnership, that would entitle him to a share.

Arthur did not dare to look in his mother's face, for he would burst into open laughter. Her apron enabled her to hide the mirth which she could not wholly restrain, while he, yielding to that spirit of fun which often controlled him, looked as grave as when discussing the same theme with Roorback Johnson.

"Explain your plans, Mr. Wonzell," he respectfully asked.

"I've been thinking a good deal over it, and the way is clear. Of course I'm too old to do much running about as some one will have to do, and therefore I'll leave that to *you*."

"I'm willing to do all that may be necessary."

"I will stay at home and give advice."

"To what extent?"

"When you strike any clew, why you will come to me, and we'll consult what is best for you to do. I can give you a good deal of help that way, I am sure; then when the business is settled up, why, we'll divide equally, eh?"

He emitted another clucking sound, and made a dig with his forefinger at Arthur's ribs, but the youth shifted his position so quickly that the momentum of the effort came nigh toppling the old man over to the floor from his seat in the rocking-chair.

With a gravity that Dolph Ashland could not have surpassed, Arthur replied, after a moment's apparent thought:

"Suppose it takes us a couple of weeks."

"That don't make any difference, Arthur; I'll be ready to furnish advice whenever you want it; you will be well paid, I tell you."

"But, if I give my whole time to it, don't you think you ought to pay me a salary—say ten dollars a day?"

"WHAT!" demanded the miser, wheeling round and staring at the audacious youth, his jaw down and his weazen eyes protruding from his head.

"The hardest work will fall upon me, and I cannot afford to devote so many days to the work."

"But I will let you have half the reward; twenty-five hundred dollars is awful wages—just think of it!"

"But if we should fail after all, it will be a total loss to me," objected Arthur.

"But you will have had my counsel without expense; I'm willing to lose that."

"I forgot," said Arthur, thoughtfully; "well, Mr. Wonzell, I will think it over."

"You don't often get such a chance," mumbled the visitor, rising to his feet, hat in hand, and shuffling to the door; "I wouldn't go into any such arrangement with anyone else, but you are a bright boy and I think my advice won't be thrown

away on you. Remember, just as soon as you get a clew come round to my house and I'll tell you just how to follow it up."

And with another effort to be courteous, he donned his new hat and closed the door behind him as he passed out.

At the gate he paused a minute and listened, while a perplexed expression crept over his forbidding face.

"I wonder what those fools are laughing at! Some folks are ungrateful, and maybe they don't appreciate my generosity."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TRUNK.

AND if mother and son ever had cause for merriment, it will be admitted that Mrs. Helmuth and Arthur possessed it.

Long after Jared Wonzell had passed beyond sight and hearing, the two gave way to mirth, for, take it all in all, it was the most ridiculous business with which each had ever had to do. Soon, however, they became serious again.

"Mr. Ketcham has given you several days to use as you think best, I believe?"

The youth signified that such was the fact.

"Why not spend most of the time in the Big Woods, keeping out of sight and watching for others?"

"Is any one else likely to visit the place?"

"Several did last year."

"But there seems to be less call for it now. However, that is about all I can do; I will take a tramp through there this afternoon, though it will be with much less hope than when looking for Mr. Wonzell's money."

After your return," said Mrs. Helmuth, gravely, "you can report to him and receive some of his valuable counsel."

"I am afraid—*hark!*"

Both heard a noise at the rear of the house, and before they could decide its meaning some one shouted:

"Open de doah, quick! Hurry up dar or all will be lost!"

"That's Roorback!" exclaimed the startled mother.

Arthur sprang to his feet and hurried to the rear where some one was knocking vigorously.

"Hurry it up! I've got it! I've got it!"

The youth turned the key and drew the door inward. As he did so, his eyes fell upon Roorback Johnson, in the overwhelming costume of the morning, but the picture of excitement.

And there was good reason for his agitation. On his shoulder, he supported the trunk, which Arthur Helmuth had delivered up the day before to the man who presented check numbered 2134.

There was no mistaking it. It was inclosed in the same numerous strengthening bands, and glistened all over with the gilt-headed nails that had awakened the curiosity of the baggage master when contemplating it on the run from New Center.

The moment the door was opened Roorback hurried inside, and, walking into the sitting-room,

carefully deposited his load on the floor, at the feet of the astonished Mrs. Helmuth.

"That's it! that's it!" said Arthur, unable to keep down his excitement at sight of the mysterious luggage.

"That is *what?*" demanded his mother.

"The missing trunk! Where did you get it, Roorback?"

Though the day was cool, the African was glistening with perspiration. His clothing was disarranged, his brilliant necktie having slipped round so that the knot was under his ear. His trousers had been torn and scratched by the briars and bushes, and the silk of his shiny little hat was brushed the wrong way in many places.

It was some minutes before the panting fellow could talk coherently, but as soon as able, he said:

"When you bid me good-bye, Artie, I tinked I would go home, but I war so uneasy I couldn't. I war afeard all de time dat somebody would come and find dat trunk afore we could get de chance. You didn't seem to be in no hurry, so I made up my mind dat I would took a look for it myself. But it's all right, Artie."

"What do you mean?"

"We're pardners just as I told you, for you allers used me right, and we'll diwide as I 'greed."

"Never mind about that; tell me how you found the trunk."

"Why I started for de Big Woods and looked fur it."

"And are you sure nobody saw you?"

"I took care for dat; dar warn't nobody in sight and I ducked among de trees. I follered de path dat you know 'bout, and bimeby seed a place where de bushes had been trod down. I tinks dat war de place to sarch and I follered. I hadn't gone fifty feet, afore I come to anoder clump ob bushes, and de fust ting dat my eyes lit on war de trunk, standin' on one end as dough it started to turn a somerset, and got tired when half way ober and stopped."

"That shows it was flung there," said Mrs. Helmuth.

"I war so scared when I seed it, dat I couldn't move for a whole minute or two; den I looked round to find out if anybody war near, but dar warn't and den I picked up de precious ting."

"Did you come directly here with it?"

"You don't s'pose I laid down and took a nap on de road, do you?"

"No, but I fear some one saw you."

"No, dey didn't; I war too sharp for dat. Just before I reached the fence, I heerd a wagon, but dar war no room to hide, and I waited till a farmer druv past, for it warn't anybody else. Den I h'isted de trunk ober my shoulder and trabled as fast as I knowed how. Once I cotched my patent leather in a root, and look at *dat!*"

He shoved one of his huge feet forward, showing the toe torn half way across the top.

"Never mind," he added with a grin, "I'll hab enough money to buy a bushel ob shoes."

"Why didn't you open the trunk, Roorback?"

"Hadn't any key dat would fit; I war afeard to bust it open 'cause I might spill some ob de money on de road; hain't you got a key dat will fit it?"

"I am afraid not," replied Arthur, who, trembling with excitement, was on his knees examining the fastening.

It seemed to be of the ordinary kind which many keys could be found to fit.

"I have a bunch upstairs," said his mother, running lightly up the steps and quickly returning with a dozen assorted keys on a ring.

"Don't disremember," added Roorback, addressing his young friend, "dat de bargain's de same as afore; one half ob de hundred thousand dollars am yours."

"I don't see what *I* have done to earn it," replied young Helmuth, nervously trying the keys.

"We went in pardners, on equal shares: *dat'* de way de ting stands."

"We'll settle that afterwards," replied Arthur, giving his attention to the work before him, sensible at the same time, however, that the whole reward, for whatever was done, belonged of rights to Roorback, with whom good fortune seemed to have formed a partnership.

One key after another was tried and he had made up his mind that the lock would have to be broken, when he discovered one that fitted exactly. Unloosening the fastenings at the side, the lid was flung back and the wonderful trunk was open.

Hardly one of the three breathed. Even the cool-headed Mrs. Helmuth caught the excitement.

The first object upon which their eyes rested was a mass of newspapers, almost filling the interior of the trunk. Reaching down his hand, Arthur drew these out one after the other. As he deposited them on the floor, his mother, who was on her knees, carefully separated them.

Paper after paper was taken out, until one remained within. The trunk was plain, with but the single compartment, so that the operation required but a minute or two.

The youth had hardly completed his work, when his mother finished hers. She had turned over and examined the papers with such minute care, that an ordinary thimble could not have escaped her eye.

The woful conclusion was before them.

The trunk did not contain a single penny!

CHAPTER XVII.

ANOTHER CALL ON MRS. HELMUTH.

It has been shown that both Arthur Helmuth and his mother had doubts from the first about the missing trunk containing the funds stolen from the bank at New Center. Still they were so hopeful that, to the son especially, the disappointment was great.

But their strongest emotion was that of pity for Roorback Johnson, who was absolutely sure that the lost fortune would be found on opening the luggage that he had brought from the Big Woods. When at last he realized that it contained nothing besides old newspapers, he was so disgusted and overcome that he staggered back into the first chair within reach, and muttered:

"I'm left, b'gosh."

"Never mind," remarked Arthur, who was able to smile, "I'm a partner with you."

"Dat's de qu'arest ting I ever knowed," he added, when he had partially recovered himself; "de money I heerd was took off in a trunk, with

gilt-head nails that dey got from you wid a check ——I know how it am!" he added, leaping up again; "excoos me, but I'm gwine after de *oder* trunk—dat is de right one; we'll be pardners in *dat* jus' the same."

And despite the urging of his friends, he hurried out of the door, through the gate and down the highway, after the manner of one who has caught a brilliant idea, and doesn't wish to waste a minute in the execution of it.

"Poor fellow," said Mrs. Helmuth, "it is a great disappointment to him."

"It could not be otherwise, but he mustn't get the idea that he is going to make his living by earning five thousand dollar rewards, for the supply is sure to run out."

"No; even if successful, it would do him more harm than good."

"Well," said Arthur, looking at the open trunk, with the waste paper lying beside it on the floor, "one step at least has been taken in the solution of the mystery. It has been found that the trunk which I checked at New Center and gave up at Beavertown did not contain the stolen money—but hold!" he added; "do you think it possible the money was in there and has been taken out?"

"It is possible, but not probable. The theory that the course of procedure was to divert suspicion from the real receptacle of the stolen funds, I consider has been established."

"Then it must be that the trunk, carried in such haste from New Center into the country, was the one in which they stored their booty."

"I believe such to be the fact."

"Mr. Ketcham told me that a skillful detective is engaged in hunting down the criminals. I am at work in the same line, and having got thus far, what ought to be my next step? Do you advise me to take the trunk down to Beavertown and tell the particulars to Mr. Ketcham, or shall I leave it here and walk down with the interesting tidings?"

"It seems to me," replied the thoughtful parent, "that if you take either course, it will amount to little. You have simply found an empty trunk—nothing more. The money is still missing, and no clue has been gained to the guilty parties. On the contrary, they will learn what has been done, and will be the more guarded in whatever steps they take."

"I am listening, Mrs. Oracle, for your orders," said Arthur, proud of his sagacious parent.

"It is fair to think that a mother can give her son useful advice, but," added the parent with a smile, "I doubt whether many of them are called upon to counsel in business like this. It seems to me, Arthur, that the best plan is for you to put the trunk back in the place it came from, and then watch for those who come after it."

"But I don't know the spot it came from."

"Roorback will show you; if he succeeded in

bringing it away without discovery, he ought to be able to return it undetected."

Young Helmuth decided to do as advised, for, as has been shown, he had unlimited confidence in his mother's judgment. The papers were restored to their place in the trunk, which was carefully locked, and made to look the same as before it was tampered with.

"There isn't much weight here," he remarked, lifting it by one handle; "I don't see why Roorback carried it on his shoulder."

"He imagined it contained a good deal of gold which you know is heavy. It seems to me, too, that he took the most convenient way of bringing it such a long distance."

It was curious that Arthur's visit to his mother should bring about several other calls, when she had not been disturbed for several days. In the midst of their talk about the trunk, the sound of the gate latch warned them of another visitor.

"Don't open the door till I get this out of the way," Arthur whispered, catching up the trunk, and whisking into the next room.

The mother made sure that he had ample time to remove the article before she answered the knock on the door.

The man who stood before her suggested a clerical gentleman or well-to-do merchant in middle life. He was tastefully dressed in dark clothes, wore a beaver hat, with a rather large rim, had a

benevolent air and carried a cane in his right hand, which was meant for use and not ornament.

"Good-morning, madam," he said, removing his hat, with a stately bow and bland smile; "I trust I am not intruding, but I would like to make a few inquiries; if you are engaged, however, I will pass on."

There was something winning in the stranger's appearance and manner, and Mrs. Helmuth asked him so cordially to step inside, that he thanked her and accepted the invitation, taking his seat at the moment Arthur came through from the dining-room and also sat down.

"I presume this young gentleman is your son?" remarked the caller, looking inquiringly from one face to the other.

"I am grateful to say that he is," remarked Mrs. Helmuth with such warmth that Arthur flushed, adding quickly:

"And I am proud to indorse her statement."

"Well now that was rather neatly put," said the other, with such genuine laughter and so glowing a face that he gained the good-will of the couple at once; "and if you will allow me to speak off-hand, I will say that I am sure each opinion is planted on a foundation of rock."

There was a general laugh all round, and, whoever the stranger was, it may be doubted whether he ever won the favor of mother and son more speedily than he did in this case.

As he sat with the end of his cane resting on the floor between his feet and the palm of his hands over the top, he was the picture of benevolence and good nature. His eyes had the twinkle of innocence, and it seemed to give him genuine pleasure, as he looked from face to face according as mother or son was speaking.

"I must not intrude on your hospitality," he said, as if rousing to the situation, "but I believe you have always lived in this neighborhood."

Mrs. Helmuth inclined her head.

"Then," added the caller, consulting a slip of paper which he took from his vest pocket, "perhaps you can tell me where to find Mr. Arundale. Jacob Arundale, the full name is."

"He died five years ago," replied the lady.

"So I heard; but our folks in the life insurance business heard something which made them desirous of a little more proof, and, as I had other business in this neighborhood, they asked me to make a few inquiries. The matter, however, was not of sufficient importance to bring me all the way to Beavertown, though it was the cause of my call *here*. There is no doubt then of the death of Mr. Arundale?"

"None whatever," replied Mrs. Helmuth; "my husband and I attended his funeral."

"Then he couldn't have been much deader; thank you."

The gentleman shook like jelly, and, despite the

incongruity of his mirth, the others could not help laughing also; his good humor was contagious.

"I shall report to the company that the demise of Mr. Arundale has been established, and they need give no further concern to the matter. In fact, they could have obtained all the facts, as you can well understand, by writing to the authorities, but they asked me to make a few inquiries and I have done so."

The conversation, which was continued some minutes longer, was of no importance, and the gentleman, repeating his warm thanks, rose to his feet, and, bidding them good-day, walked off in the direction of Beavertown.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BOORBACK'S NEW FRIEND.

THE reader will not deny that Mrs. Helmuth and her son were alert and intelligent, but, although they kept a pretty close watch of their visitor, during the brief time spent in their home, they failed to note a very significant fact.

Arthur was only prudent when he hastily removed the trunk with its gilt-head nails, to the dining-room, before the caller entered. Coming back, he partly shut the door, but did not take pains to close it entirely.

There seemed to be no reason why he should do so. It struck him as inhospitable to shut off communication with the dining-room, just as the caller sat down, as if to notify him that no food was to be obtained there. It was, therefore, left ajar, the opening facing the wall opposite the portly stranger. He would have to leave his seat and pass around Arthur, who was seated near the door, to gain a view of the dining-room. He was not likely to attempt anything of the kind, and, if he did, would be checked before reaching the opening.

But whether designedly so or not, the position of the caller enabled him to look through the crack of the door into the dining-room, where one corner of the important trunk was visible. Arthur noticed nothing in the manner of the man to show he was gazing at any object beside himself when his glances were turned in that direction, but after events left no doubt that his professed desire to learn something about the deceased Mr. Arundale was a subterfuge. He was seeking information of the missing trunk and he got it.

The reader has already suspected the truth; the benevolent-looking gentleman was Detective Cinch, who was pursuing his investigation of the bank burglary, not only with vigor but in a line with his own theories. Like a genuine searcher after truth, he kept his own counsel, despite the pen pictures of detectives in many of our popular stories.

It was necessary that the officer should have his headquarters where he could effect any change desired in his make up, without subjecting himself to question. Instead of staying at the hotel, therefore, he made his home at the residence of President Ketcham, when in Beavertown. He was frequently called to New Center, and sometimes found it necessary to drop off at other stations along the road; but, when he did so, his special personnel was arranged at the home of Mr. Ketcham.

Mr. Cinch paid his fare like any other passenger,

for had he used a pass it might have awakened inquiry or drawn attention to himself. His experience enabled him to assume many characters, and he always had a seemingly legitimate errand to justify his inquiries wherever he made them.

From the house of Arthur Helmuth, the portly gentleman walked along the highway in the direction of Beavertown, seemingly absorbed in his own thoughts, but with his eyes and ears opened. One of the first things he learned on taking up his profession was that the detective who succeeds, though often helped by accident, must slight no means, however insignificant it may seem, that can add anything to the knowledge he is seeking.

Roorback Johnson, after leaving the Helmuths in such haste, had turned about and was retracing his steps. His actions were those of a man who had forgotten something. He gazed curiously at the benevolent looking gentleman, as they neared each other, and, in answer to the pleasant salutation, lifted his silk tile, which was now brushed to its original glossiness. Roorback never forgot the obligations of courtesy.

"May I ask," said the elder, stopping short, "whether you live in this neighborhood?"

"Yes, sah," replied Roorback, "dis part ob de kentry has de honah ob my residence."

"Then you are well acquainted with the people hereabouts?"

"I is, sah; can I gibs you any disinformation?"

"I was looking for a Mr. Arundale, but Mrs. Helmuth down the road informs me he has been dead several years."

"You is correctly disinformed; hab you been down dar?" asked Roorback in turn, indicating the direction with his cane; "Arthur Helmuth and me am pardners in a wery 'portant bus'ness 'rangement."

"Yes; they seem to be very nice people; the son is a young gentleman."

"No mistake 'bout *dat!*" exclaimed the African, whose admiration for Arthur Helmuth showed itself at all times; "he's a 'tickler friend ob mine."

"I congratulate you both, for you will allow me to say that the first look I took at you showed me you possessed brains."

Detective Cinch knew just how to suit his flattery to the person whom he wished to win. Roorback grinned and gracefully tipped his hat with a——

"Tank you, sah; you's bery kind; I reckons whateber dey say 'bout me dey don't say I am a fool; I reckons, too, dat old Wonzell would neber hab got his money back last year widout my help."

"Why, are you the young gentleman who saw the criminals leave the hotel at Three Bridges, when they started to rob the old man?"

"Dat's my name, sah!"

"Why I'm proud to know you; allow me to shake your hand."

Roorback removed his glove and granted the favor requested.

The white man had posted himself on the particulars of the affair that is already known to the reader. He knew who Roorback was, the moment he set eyes on him, for he was one of the "characters" first pointed out to him on his arrival in Beavertown; but his look of surprise and delight was so marked, that the colored youth was delighted and was sure he was one of the finest gentlemen he had ever met. He was showing more consideration for him than had been displayed by any of his acquaintances.

"Yes, sah," he added leaning one hand on the fence and twirling his cane; "Arthur Helmuth and me am pardners in a wery 'portant bus'ness 'rangement."

"Ah, then it is sure of success, for where you and he unite your abilities, you *must* win."

Roorback's heart gave another little flutter, for it was very pleasing to be appreciated by such a fine looking gentleman.

"I tinks so, dough dar's been a little slip at de beginnin' owing to my gettin' de wrong trun—dat am de wrong *article*."

"Well, little mistakes like that must happen, but you will get the right one the next time," said the detective, cheerily. He caught the slip like a flash, though nothing in his manner showed it; "you must find out the *right spot*."

"Dat's de idee; but I neber war so sartin ob anyting in my life, as dat de money war in dat trun—I mean I neber war so sartin dat de right folks war in de train," corrected Roorback, so laboriously that it required an effort of the officer to repress a smile,

He realized he had struck a diminutive gold mine, which was panning out rich, with little digging on his part. He had learned that Roorback helped young Helmuth in the trunk business, and he meant to reach the bottom facts.

"I hope you will succeed, for there must be money in the enterprise or *you* could not afford to give it your attention."

This flattering remark was punctuated with the offer of a fragrant cigar which completely captured Roorback. He was sure such a noble gentleman never lived before. He thanked him for the weed, and, when he had caught the flame from the match, and the glowing end was pointed skyward, and the other had lighted his own cigar from his, why there was nothing too good for him.

The officer saw the time had come to apply the pump vigorously.

"Now, as I said, Roorback, your mistake was natural; when you took the trunk from the station——"

"No; it war from de Big Woods—who told you 'bout *dat?*" he asked, realizing his blunder.

"Never mind, my good friend, you needn't be

afraid to trust *me*; when you found the trunk in the Big Woods and you and young Helmuth carried it to his house——"

"*He* didn't hab nuffin to do wid it; I took it myself."

"Beg pardon; when you took it yourself, why of course it was natural that you should think it contained the money, but it didn't."

"No; and it am jus' like de one dat I heerd de money was tooken off in."

"So it was; they must have had a couple of twin trunks."

"Ob course, and I'm gwine to find de oder one, but Artie has a key dat fits dis one, and I'm gwine to borrer it to use on de oder, when I finds it, so dat I won't hab de whole journey for nuffin."

"A wise precaution," remarked the detective, who felt he had picked up all valuable points obtainable from that source. "Now, Roorback, since we understand each other, and you know I'm your friend, I want you to promise me you won't say a word to your friend Arthur about our little talk."

The African felt a slight pricking of conscience, under the knowledge that he had given things away too readily, but he made the promise; and, bidding his fine friend good-bye a few minutes later, continued his course to Arthur's home.

Meanwhile, Detective Cinch kept on to Beavertown, and went at once to the residence of President Ketcham, for he had important business on hand and no time was to be lost in attending to it.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN ASTOUNDING DISCOVERY.

ARRIVED at the home of Arthur Helmuth, Roorback hardly waited until his knock was answered, when he entered, saying he had come for the key, which unlocked the small trunk, convinced that it must fit the other, since both seemed to have been constructed on the same model.

"Before I give it to you, I want you to take this trunk back to the place where you found it."

"What fur?"

"It is of no use here; we will leave it there in order that we may learn who comes to look for it; I will go with you."

The proposition did not fully suit Roorback. He explained that he wished to make search for the right trunk, which there was reason to believe was somewhere in the neighborhood of New Center.

"We can arrange that," replied Arthur, removing the key from the ring and handing it to him; "as soon as you have replaced this baggage, you can go to New Center, while I will stay here and do the watching."

"Dat will suit me obzactly," said the pleased youth; "I'm ready wheneber you am."

"If the way is clear, we may as well go now."

A reconnoissance showed no one in sight, and the start was made. The couple avoided the traveled highway and passed across the fields. At the suggession of Mrs. Helmuth, her shawl was wrapped over the trunk, so that, if they met any one on the way, the nature of the burden would not be recognized.

It was arranged that Roorback should keep to the rear, so that Arthur, in advance, could look out for parties whom they wished to avoid.

They narrowly escaped a calamity at the beginning, for, just as they were leaving the house, Arthur saw his old friend, Fred Woodson, coming down the road toward his home. The couple slipped back into cover. Young Helmuth expected his playmate to call, but Fred did not know he was at home, or he certainly would have done so, and, whistling merrily, continued on his way.

The moment he was out of sight, the journey was pushed rapidly, but with care. Reaching the edge of the Big Woods, they were convinced no one had observed them, and advanced thenceforth with greater confidence. The immense forest was familiar to both, and, striking the path alluded to, Roorback led until he reached the spot where he turned off on his former journey. Arthur observed the trampled bushes, and followed his guide to the

very spot where he first saw the mysterious article. There it was left standing on its head, just as he found it. The shawl was removed and taken in charge by Arthur, and the work of the other for the time was finished.

"Now I'm off for New Center," said Roorback, removing his tile and drawing his handkerchief around it several times, to restore its original smoothness; "dat is, if you haben't no disjections."

"None at all; I wish you all success, and have only to warn you against letting anyone know your business."

"You needn't be afeard ob *dat;* an' you know, Artie, dat when I gots it, we're pardners jus' as we war afore."

"I won't forget your kindness, but don't mind about that."

"It's blamed lucky dat he didn't ax me wheder I *had* talked to nobody," muttered Roorback, with a chuckle, after parting with his friend, "for I would hab had to tell him, and he would worry; it's all right, I know, but dar's no need ob *his* knowin' it."

At the suggestion of Arthur, the lad took a roundabout course from the spot, reaching the highway at a point far removed from where he entered. After climbing several fences, he found himself on the straight road to Beavertown, where he arrived after a brisk walk.

He was just in time to catch the train for New

Center. Several other passengers boarded it, among the number being a man dressed as a common laborer, with a repellant appearance, who slouched into the smoking car, and lit a clay pipe, in which he seemed to find great solace.

It would have been hard for Roorback to believe that this individual was the portly, benevolent-looking gentleman with whom he held pleasing converse near Arthur's house, but such, nevertheless, was the fact.

Young Helmuth did not enjoy his situation. He had ensconced himself in a secluded spot, commanding the path leading to the spot where the trunk stood, but without risk of being discovered himself. He had little hope of success, except after a long and trying wait. He thought it unlikely that any one would appear before night, with the chances strongly against its taking place even then.

Nothing is more wearisome than such a situation. The minutes drag slowly, and none but a trained detective or stolid Indian or sluggish Esquimo can content himself hour after hour with waiting, waiting, waiting.

He regretted that he had not thought to bring a book with which to while away the hours, for, as it was, he had to retain substantially the same posture for an indefinite time.

Adjusting the folded shawl, so as to serve for a pillow, he assumed an easy posture, after first mak-

ing sure no one could observe him, and, lying flat on his back, gazed upward through the limbs at the patch of blue sky overhead.

A few white clouds were drifting past, and, far up in the deep blue, he observed a bird sailing, it's height so great that it was but the tiniest black speck floating in and out among the vapor, sometimes visible, again lost to sight, and finally gliding out of his field of vision.

The caw of a crow reached his ear, and the whistle of the train, bearing Roorback Johnson and Detective Cinch eastward, sounded clear and distinct, though fully a mile distant. Then the shout of a boy seemed to be within a few rods, though he knew it came from a point almost as far away.

The snowy clouds in the zenith floated further to the northward until they, too, were gone, and the beautiful azure was all that met his eye. Across this space, a flock of wild geese suddenly swept, in the form of a triangle, which shifted into another geometrical figure, a moment before vanishing. The honk of the birds was clear, though faint, and their flight southward was a warning of the approach of winter.

It was a dreamy scene, and the rustling of an occasional leaf, as it separated from the parent stem and fluttered downward, was like the whisper of silence itself.

In spite of Arthur's interest in his undertaking,

he was beginning to yield to the drowsy influence of the hour and place, though the thought of such forgetfulness had not occurred to him when he assumed his easy position on the velvety ground.

Fortunately, however, before his senses departed from him, and when his nerves were in the most sensitive condition, he was roused by the unmistakable sound of footsteps coming along the path a short way off. Whoever the party was, he was advancing with moderate care only, else he might not have been detected.

The youth was alert at once. Turning on his side, he slightly raised his head, and peered through the interstices in the undergrowth by which he was enveloped. He saw the outlines of a man, though so indistinctly that he could not identify him, nor gain a satisfactory view of his countenance.

The stranger moved without hesitation, but his actions showed that he, too, was vigilant, and on the watch for interlopers. Turning from the path, he stepped forward a few paces, until he saw the trunk standing on end. Then he paused, as though satisfied.

At this moment his back was toward Arthur, who began to feel nervous lest he should go away without revealing himself. This would never do, for, even if the man were a stranger, it was all important that the youth should be able to identify him.

But a moment before moving off, he swung com-

pletely around, as if to survey all points of the compass. This brought his face into sight, and stamped his features upon the watcher so vividly that he cannot forget them to his dying day.

And when Arthur Helmuth's eyes rested on him, he came near uttering an exclamation of amazement, for the sight of his own mother would not have astounded him more.

Had not the watcher seen the face of the man in the Big Woods too plainly to be mistaken, he would have believed he was dreaming; but he was becoming accustomed to surprises, and he did not stir beneath his shelter until several minutes after the other passed from sight along the path by which he had reached the spot.

At one time the youth believed he was about to be discovered. The man seemed to be looking directly at the place where he was hidden, but he soon shifted his gaze and went away.

"Well," sighed Arthur, after relating the circumstances to his mother on his return, "I am prepared now for anything. Shall I tell Mr. Ketcham?"

"Make haste slowly," was the reply; "say nothing to him as yet; if I saw any harm likely to come from delay I would not permit it, but since you have gained this important knowledge you are entitled to whatever benefit it may bring to you."

Mrs. Helmuth was worldly wise. She felt that her son had as much right as any one to earn the

liberal reward offered by the New Center Bank and that it would be foolish in him to throw away his opportunity of doing so. He had touched the fringe of the mystery, as it may be called, but it remained for him to enter the circle, where, at present, it looked impenetrable.

CHAPTER XXX.

ANOTHER PARTNERSHIP.

ALTHOUGH Arthur Helmuth never would have consented that Roorback Johnson should give any information to the man that had extracted it from him, yet nothing more fortunate for the youth could have happened.

The officer was distrustful of him, though he sought to keep the fact from President Ketcham. This distrust was only superficial, but it was sufficient to lead him to take steps to learn more about the young man, than he was able to gain from the head of the H. & N. C. Railway. It may be said that he had a number of other persons "on his list" for investigation.

The discovery of the trunk in the home of Arthur convinced him of a guilty knowledge on the part of the latter. That knowledge would have led to other steps, which must have humiliated the lad, and brought great distress to himself, his mother and friends.

But the interview with Roorback Johnson threw the fullest light on the subject, and made everything clear, so far as it could be made so for the

time. Before parting with the sable youth, the detective learned what he knew about the parties who carried the trunk from Beavertown station. Henceforth his researches led along different lines.

When the afternoon was well along, Arthur decided to walk to Beavertown and call upon the president. He was so full of the discoveries that he had made that it was hard to remain idle. He expected to return early in the evening, though the feeling was strong upon him that stirring events were at hand.

He delayed his departure until it was quite late, so that it was growing dark when he entered the station. On calling at the president's office, he was told that he had gone to New Center, but was expected back on the Express, which would soon be due.

Arthur was about to saunter down town, when some one touched his elbow, and looking round, he saw Dolph Ashland, one of the telegraph operators attached to Mr. Ketcham's office.

Arthur had a strong liking for the young man, and greeted him cordially. Dolph, who was equally fond of him, repressed all gush, for he was never guilty of that, and said:

"Walk up the street, and I will join you; I want you to go with me to my room; I have something important to say to you."

Arthur did as requested, and the telegraphist, telling Garrity that he would leave rather earlier

than usual to go to dinner (as he called his evening meal), went out, lit his pipe, and speedily overtook young Helmuth, who was walking slowly.

The talk was general until the room of Ashland was reached and the door locked behind them. Then, assuming an easy position in his favorite arm-chair, Dolph slowly puffed his brierwood, and, looking calmly at his friend startled him with the question:

"Don't you think it a risky thing, Helmuth, for you to take Roorback Johnson in as your partner in the detective line?"

Arthur flushed, and demanded:

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't I speak plain English? If not, I will change the question to the remark that you have done a foolish thing in taking the course you did with that darky, whose piece of good luck in the Wonzell affair has given him such a big head that he really believes he *does* know something."

"Have you been talking with him?" asked Arthur, striving to avoid committing himself, though it was evident his friend was not talking at random.

"I never exchanged a word with him in my life."

"Then how—how——"

"How did I come to know what I *do* know?" broke in Ashland, with one of his shadowy smiles. "I'll tell you."

THE CONFERENCE BETWEEN ARTHUR HELMUTH AND DOLPH ASHLAND.

With one hand he replaced the brierwood pipe in his mouth, and with the other fumbled in his vest pocket. Extracting a telegram, on folded yellow paper, he flipped it across to Arthur, who opened and read the following prodigious message:

ARTIE HELMOUTH: I've lost that blamed kea—gitt another maid rite orph and send to Roorback Johnson, Waveyourly hoetel, Nu Senter. Ime shure of findin' the rite trunk this time—keep mum is the word—I ant givin' nuffin' 'way—nobody don't noa Ime gwine to git the munny this time—we'll diwide ekle and won t we cut a swell?

ROORBACK JOHNSON, the Scout.

"That original message came to the office a little while ago, when Garrity was out. I knew you did not care to have any one know about it, and that you were in no special hurry to receive it, so I pocketed it until I could meet you."

"Well, this *is* richness!" was about all Arthur could say, still careful not to betray himself.

"I don't know whether you will thank me for intermeddling," added Ashland, "but I ventured to send your reply to Mr. Johnson for you."

"What did you say?"

"I said you couldn't get the key duplicated until next winter, inasmuch as you had to send to the Sandwich Islands for it, but under no circumstances must he send you another word by telegraph. I had the impudence to sign your name to that, Helmuth. At the same time I exchanged a few words with Dick; the operator in New Center, with whom

I used to swap jokes when I was at Ardvale. I told him not to allow any African dude to send you any more messages, but to scare him half to death if he tried it. Roorback was in the office when my request reached Dick, who told him that a law had just been passed, punishing every negro with ten years in State prison for sending a teleraphic message about a trunk key to anybody. The fellow was so frightened that he begged Dick not to betray him. He promised, and I reckon that's the last telegram from Roorback Johnson."

"I appreciate your kindness, for I can see that, despite the privacy of telegraphic messages, such proceedings are likely to get me into trouble. Now, Ashland, since you have been so frank, tell me what you make of this."

"Roorback Johnson saw that mysterious trunk taken from the station last night; he saw the man come from a piece of forest near your home, which I believe is known as the Big Woods; Roorback made search, discovered the trunk and took it to your house, expecting to find one hundred thousand dollars in it; I shouldn't wonder," added Ashland with a sly look, "that a certain young man about your age had some expectations also in that direction; but the money was *non est*; the enthusiastic African has set out for New Center to push his hunt in that direction, but having lost the key you furnished him, telegraphed you for a duplicate. It may be," continued Ashland, who would

have his jest at all times, "that he supposed, inasmuch as you have opened a branch office for duplicate trunk checks, you could furnish extra keys for baggage."

"I shall have to come down," said Arthur with a laugh, feeling that it was idle to hold off any longer; "everything you have said is strictly true, but you haven't received the whole truth; shall I tell it to you?"

"You may, if you think I can stand it."

Thereupon Arthur related every particular concerning the trunk, so far as he knew it, with the exception of the discovery he had made that afternoon in the Big Woods. Ashland calmly smoked his pipe, without asking a question or making a remark until the narrative was finished. It was apparent, however, that he was pleased to learn how it was his friend came to be associated with Roorback Johnson in the delicate business.

Arthur waited for the comments from the operator, but the latter just then was busy at his old amusement of trying to hang several wreaths of smoke, projected from his mouth, over a nail, a short distance above the gas jet, but the current caused by the latter prevented full success."

"Well, Ashland, I'm waiting to hear what you have to say."

"I have a proposition to make," was the reply, as the other still persevered with his task despite his repeated failures.

"I shall be glad to hear it."

"In the first place, Helmuth, I don't think you are a fool, a thief or a sneak; I propose that you and I form a limited partnership for the pushing of certain inquiries having to do with the bank burglary at New Center; you have certain facilities denied me, while I can command a few beyond your reach."

"I accept your proposition off-hand."

"Thanks—and having done so I wish to say that the confidence between us must be complete or the partnership is off; you haven't told me *everything* you know bearing on this business."

"Nor have you told me all that *you* know."

"Granted, but I am about to do so."

"Proceed and I will reciprocate."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CONFERENCE.

DOLPH ASHLAND smiled at the manner in which his friend snapped him up. But he did not hesitate. He knew his man.

"To-day you found out the person who helped to hide the trunk in the woods near your home."

"I saw the man who went out there to examine the surroundings, probably to learn whether it was still there or not; but I have no actual knowledge that he was one of those who bore it thither."

"You are mistaken."

"But I should know whether I possess such knowledge."

"You have it now."

"What do you mean?"

"*I* give it to you; he was the man; he is one of the original brothers; he is a member of the gang."

Despite the shock Arthur Helmuth received that day, when he saw for the first time the face of the individual who entered the Big Woods, he had a half hope and belief that he was not criminally concerned in the business. But the positive words of Dolph Ashland now destroyed that hope.

"I am amazed," was his comment, "but I accept the truth of what you say."

"I've got the dead wood on him," coolly remarked the telegraphist, relighting his pipe which had been forgotten for a minute or two.

"Why don't you arrest him?"

"Of what avail would it be? It isn't *he* that is wanted so bad just now, but the boodle; we must locate the second trunk before we throw our arms around this amiable scamp and clasp him to our hearts."

"Ashland," said Arthur who recalled that some more information was due from him; "I have told you about all I know of this business, and now I wish to ask you a question."

"I am listening."

"Mr. Ketcham has employed one of the best detectives in the country on the case; I suppose I may have met him, but, if so, I have never suspected his identity; do *you* know him?"

The telegraphist shifted his chair, so that his arms were folded over the upper part of the back —his position being reversed—and he puffed a few seconds without replying or glancing in the face of his young friend, whose gaze was fixed on him. Still looking at the wall opposite, he spoke slowly:

"Helmuth, I will say this much, which is all I can say at present: there *is* one of Blackerton's detectives on the case; I have a suspicion of his identity, but it is not clear to me that I ought to tell

you whom I suspect. Being so near Mr. Ketcham most of the time Garrity and I see nearly every one who enters or leaves. If I observe a certain gentleman pass out from a long conference with the president, and form a suspicion that he is a detective, I may be all wrong; if I make you feel the same, I do him a double wrong, and complicate the measures which you may set afoot; you will see the point of what I say and agree that it is best I should not specify him."

"I am satisfied, but tell me whether Garrity suspects him."

"I have seen no evidence that he does, but Garrity and I have little to say to each other; he doesn't like me."

"Why?"

"He has made Mr. Ketcham suspect that I have a hand in this crooked business."

"How could he do that?"

"Mr. Ketcham gives him his full confidence and withholds it from me."

"Why don't you——"

"I'm satisfied to wait the whirligig of time, which is said to set all things right; but I care nothing, after all; I seek the good will of no person; if he doesn't like me, I am not going to worry about it; I could easily remove the suspicion, but I shall never say a word or do a thing with that purpose; he may find out his mistake in the course of a few weeks, months or years, but if he don't, what odds?

The world will continue to revolve on its axis without any wabbling, and it will be all the same a hundred years from now. But I invited you up here to talk business; you must go to New Center as soon as you possibly can."

"For what purpose?"

"Do you need to ask me? Hasn't it been proven that the trunk we want is in *that* neighborhood? That's the article to find; get that and the parties who took it away will be scooped in afterward, but we don't want *them* until after the boodle is found; *that* I think is in the trunk yet, and is likely to stay there for several days, so we haven't any time to throw away."

"Is there any one at New Center that you wish me to see?"

"There are two persons."

"Name them?"

"The first," said Ashland, with the utmost gravity, "is the man who has got the baggage with the money in it. Call on him as soon as you reach town and before you go to the hotel."

"I shall be glad to do so," said Arthur, with mock gravity, "but you must first secure me his address; who is the other gentleman you desire me to interview?"

"Roorback Johnson."

"For what purpose?"

"Persuade him to accompany you to some lonely spot, and when you have him out of sight of every-

body, kill him. That is the only way to prevent him from jumbling things up so that we shall be baffled at every step. Don't you agree with me?"

"Your idea is a brilliant one, and I will think it over," said Arthur, rising to his feet as Ashland did the same.

The two passed downstairs and out upon the street, whence they walked slowly in the direction of the railway station. The local train eastward left in the course of half an hour, but, seeing no necessity of haste in the matter, Arthur decided to spend the evening with his mother as he had promised to do. He wanted her aid in considering the new phase of the business, and, despite the hope he felt earlier in the evening, little of it now remained. He asked himself what he would do on reaching New Center. That was a large and enterprising town, but he had no knowledge of the right way to search for the trunk which was believed to contain the funds stolen from the bank.

The young men talked in low tones, as they sauntered along the street, occasionally glancing around, to make sure no one was within earshot. They were certain that not a word was overheard, but all the same, had they glanced to the other side, where the lights were burning so brightly, they might have noted a man, who about half a square behind them, so graduated his pace that the same relative distance was maintained.

When they stopped at the corner to say good-

night to each other, the stranger also halted, keeping within the shadow of a tree, where, if either glanced across the street, he would not observe the spy.

Arthur waved his hand to his friend and started at a brisk walk toward the open country, soon disappearing from sight. Ashland remained where they parted, as if he wished to finish his smoke before returning to his office. But standing thus, he faced the other way, and soon caught sight of the figure of a man who had been watching them, as he emerged from the shadow of the tree, and came across the street diagonally toward him. Dolph at once looked the other way.

The individual increased his pace, but did not halt or speak on reaching the spot. The telegraph man moved forward by his side, the two walking several paces, as if they were strangers, and the companionship was one of the accidental meetings which sometimes occur under such circumstances.

"Well, how is it?" asked the newcomer, after they had walked along together for some distance in silence.

"All looks well; he is a bright fellow."

"Does he suspect me?"

"Not at all; you need have no fear of him; he goes to New Center to-morrow morning."

"Why doesn't he go to-night?"

"He found out about *him*."

"Yes; *he* made a bad break this afternoon, in going to the woods to look after the baggage."

A few more words were exchanged, and then the man moved off. The parting was informal, but the glare of the street lamp which fell upon his face would have shown any one acquainted with him that he was the same individual who sat beside Dolph Ashland that day in the restaurant, and who resented so promptly the cavalier treatment of the telegraph operator.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN IMPORTANT SUMMONS.

WHEN Arthur Helmuth arrived in the town of New Center, he was impressed with the truth that, if he hoped to attain any success in the unearthing of the bank burglary, he must proceed on what may be called a scientific basis: that is to say, he would err fatally, if he relied upon accident or chance to guide him aright, though experience has proven that the most brilliant exploits of our professional detectives are often due to such aids.

His first inquiry was after the gentleman who had seen the carriage and the trunk, on the afternoon of the robbery, when the criminals made haste from the bank. The individual was found without difficulty, but did not pan out as well as expected. He had seen a carriage in which were seated two persons, one of whom corresponded with the description of the rogue that carried off the large sum of money. The vehicle was emerging from the alley at the rear of the institution, and did so in such haste that the pedestrian nar-

rowly escaped being run over. In his scramble to take care of himself, he was not sure of the course taken by the careless driver, but believed it was to the left, which was in the direction of the open country.

Another person, however, was found who was positive the carriage went the opposite way. If this were correct, there was no saying where the destination of the parties lay.

Having exhausted this source of information, or mis-information as the result might prove, Arthur ventured to question the police, confident that they possessed valuable knowledge. Perhaps they did, but, if so, they showed no intention of sharing it with anyone else. The less knowledge a policeman has about such a subject, the more profoundly wise he strives to look. In fact, one of the officers, with whom young Helmuth was well acquainted, informed him that things were in such shape that the right men would be arrested within twenty-four hours, and there was little doubt the entire amount of money would be recovered. The same officer advised him that the wisest course was to return to his work on the railway, and the young man was inclined to think his friend was half right.

About the only thing accomplished thus far was the identification of the visitor to the Big Woods. This was important, but Arthur could not see, after all, how it was to give him much help in the task he had set for himself.

There were two persons, presumably in New Center, in whom he felt more than ordinary interest. One he was anxious to meet and the other to avoid. He thought, if he could locate the detective, he might secure information from him, but he was also well aware that if that same gentleman understood his business, he would be the last one whose knowledge he could turn to account.

The other person was Roorback Johnson. Nothing had been heard from him since his telegraphing ambition was nipped in the bud, but young Helmuth believed he was still trying to track that elusive trunk with a vigor and style peculiarly his own. That he should succeed was out of the question, but, as Dolph Ashland had shown, he was liable to play the mischief with others engaged in the same business.

In his pursuit of information, Arthur entered the bar-room of the Waverley Hotel. He had no definite plan in mind, but vaguely hoped he might pick up something of interest even if it possessed little value.

As he passed through the door, he saw that the half dozen parties in the place were ranged in front of the bar, and in the act of drinking at the expense of the one standing near the middle of the row. The latter wore a shiny silk tile on one side of his head, an immense standing collar, a fashionable coat, trousers with a prodigious plaid, fancy patent leather gaiters, and rested the huge head of his cane

on the edge of the bar, so as to permit him to gesticulate and use his arms freely.

"Yes; gemmen, dis am at my expense—dis am wid me; I's here on 'portant business; ob course you can't 'spect me to give myself 'way, I gets dat reward ob five thousand dol— dat is de money dat will be mine when I find dat trun—dat is when de bus'ness comes out all right—well, gemmen, here's lookin' at yer."

Arthur had heard enough, and quickly withdrew without being observed by the enthusiastic African with whom the rest were not loath to drink, so long as he paid the expense. He felt that Roorback must be got out of the place at any cost. While he was not prepared to adopt the heroic measures proposed by Dolph Ashland, he telegraphed him at once, begging him to get the enthusiastic fellow to Beavertown without delay.

Dolph was equal to the occasion.

Within less than an hour, while Roorback was sitting in the bar-room, entertaining the loungers, who would have been glad to hustle him out but for the money he was expending upon them, a small boy, in the blue uniform of a messenger of the Western Union Telegraph Company, entered and looked around, as if searching for some one. Catching sight of the colored dude, leaning back in his chair, with his legs crossed, the point of his cigar turned toward the ceiling and his hat tipped over one eye, he withdrew his soiled book from his

pocket, looked at the damp yellow envelope between the leaves and shuffling up to him, asked:

"Is your name Roorback Johnson?"

"It am," was the dignified response; "what kin I do for you, sonny?"

"Give me ten cents for bringing you that message."

Roorback looked a little startled on finding the telegram was for him; and, allowing his chair to tip forward on its four legs, he hastily opened the envelope while the messenger boy gaped around the bar-room and the loungers kept their eyes upon the African.

"Golly," he gasped, "dat's bad news."

That he was deeply stirred was apparent to all. He signed the receipt with a trembling hand, handed a dime to the boy, and rose to his feet with the remark:

"You'll hab to excoos me, gentlemen."

"No bad news, I hope," ventured one, who had imbibed several times at Roorback's expense and was hopeful of more opportunities.

"De wust kind ob news," he replied, swallowing a lump in his throat, and looking furtively around the room, as if undecided what his next step should be.

"Any of your friends dead?"

"Wuss dan dat."

"Badly hurt?"

"A good 'eal wusser dan dat; don't ax me,

gemmen, for it pains me too much to spoke ob it; when does de next train lebe for Beavertown?"

The bartender, who was fully informed on such matters, replied that the last train had gone ten minutes before.

"Den I'll hab to hire a special ingine," exclaimed Roorback, moving uneasily about; "dar isn't a minute to spare! I mus' be in Beavertown to-night; what'll it cost to hire an ingine?"

"That depends how far you want to go; I guess you can get one for seventy-five or a hundred dollars to take you."

But, although Roorback had been quite flush of late, he had no such sum as that about him. Without bidding his friends good-bye, he suddenly bolted out of the door, and started on a run for the station which was near at hand. He had heard the whistle of a locomotive, and was hopeful that something might occur to delay the starting of the train.

He was in luck; the bartender had given him the wrong hour (let us trust by mistake) for the departure of the train, and he arrived just in time to buy his ticket and leap on board before the gate closed.

Dropping into his seat in one corner, his forehead covered with drops of perspiration, he drew the telegram from his pocket and carefully studied out the words which were already vividly stamped on his brain.

Let's peep over his shoulder.

"If you love Miss Scruggs, come back without delay; your enemies have spread the report that you are paying your addresses to Miss Hannah Wilkins, and expect soon to be engaged. There is reason to believe that Miss Scruggs is arranging to elope with that low down Holdover Watkins.

"A TRUE FRIEND."

No wonder poor Roorback was anxious and excited. Of course he had no suspicion of the trick that had been played upon him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A PASSENGER FOR ARDVALE.

PRESIDENT KETCHAM, of the H. & N. C. Railway, stepped from his private office into the adjoining room, where Isaac Garrity was sitting alone before his telegraphic instrument. No one else was present, and the gentleman placed himself at the elbow of his trusted employee.

"Ashland has not shown up to-day," said the latter, with a trifle of impatience.

"Did he say anything to you when he left last night?" inquired the president.

"He did not even bid me good-evening; he is acting very strangely of late."

"Have you caught any more messages of his?"

"No, sir; he seems to be suspicious; at least he is so guarded that I have gained no additional knowledge of 'Q. Z. Z.' or any of his mysterious friends. Still he may have arranged it so that none is sent except upon a signal from him that I am not present."

"I don't think you will see Ashland again for

some time," was the significant remark of Mr. Ketcham, at which the operator faced around and stared inquiringly at him.

"Has he been discharged?"

"Would you not be better pleased if I should give you a new helper?" asked the president in turn, evading a direct reply.

"I would, for you know it is unpleasant to be associated with one whom we are forced to distrust."

"Jackson will be here after lunch," added the president, alluding to one of the operators in the New Center office.

Garrity's countenance showed that the news was pleasant, though he seemed pained to condemn the erratic, but bright young man whom the president had promoted from the Ardvale station to his own office.

"I am sure Jackson and I will get along together; I am sorry that we could not give our full confidence to Ashland, for he has many good points."

"So have some of the most dangerous criminals in the country."

The president rose to return to his office, when Garrity said with evident reluctance:

"I had arranged to be absent this evening, but I presume this change will not permit it."

"Is your business important?"

"I had promised to sit up with a sick friend,

but I will send word that it will be impossible to do so for some nights to come, if he holds out that long."

The operator sighed, as if with sympathetic sorrow.

"You can go; Jackson will be here on the up train, and, as there is no rush of business just now, he will doubtless be able to attend to it all satisfactorily."

The operator gratefully thanked his employer, and resumed his work at the instrument, promising to give the newcomer all the points he needed.

Returning to his office, the president lighted a cigar and sat down with the air and manner of one suffering from great dejection of spirits. That such was the fact was apparent from the words which occasionally escaped him, as he leaned back in his chair and gazed thoughtfully at the opposite wall.

"It is too bad; whom is it safe to trust? A young man who betrays the confidence of his employer deserves the worst possible punishment; mercy to such only encourages others to follow in their crooked paths, and adds to the peril that threatens the very foundations of society. I shall spare no pains nor expense to fasten the guilt upon the right ones, and they shall suffer to the fullest extent of the law."

That afternoon the new telegraph operator

arrived from New Center, and Garrity immediately took him in hand. There was really little instruction to give him, since the president employed only experts, and Jackson had gained much knowledge of the duties of the office while at work thirty miles away.

The westward bound Express contained several passengers that evening in whom we are interested. Isaac Garrity, carrying a small hand valise, entered the first car after the smoker, where he seated himself in the corner at the rear, as though he wished to escape the notice of every one. He took a newspaper from his pocket, and appeared to be interested in its contents, though the eyes remained fixed upon the print without gathering much of the sense it was meant to convey.

His thoughts were elsewhere. Finally he laid down the paper and gazed out of the window at the scenery, gradually growing indistinct in the gathering darkness. Being an employee of the company, the telegraphist paid no fare. The conductor merely nodded to him as he went through, without asking, to see his pass, and he was not disturbed again.

There were fifteen passengers in the same car with Garrity five of whom were ladies. His glances from one to the other failed to show any with whom he was acquainted, and he gave them no further attention. If he was desirous of avoiding notice, he had every reason to believe he succeeded.

The looks which he cast from the window at his side showed the night to be clear, with the moon shining. As the reader will remember, the country around Beavertown grew wild and unsettled the further the advance was made toward Hurvan, until stretches were encountered, where, for miles, nothing but dismal woods met the eye.

The Express slowed up in passing through Durmore, but quickly increased its pace and steamed rapidly on in the direction of Ardvale, ten miles distant. As the latter station (where Dolph Ashland first served the H. & N. C. Railway Company) was approached, Garrity proved by his manner that he expected to leave the train at that particular point.

It was not a stopping place for the Express, but Tom Ledwith, at the request of the president's private secretary, promised to slacken sufficiently to allow him to leap off without danger to himself. The faithful engineer did not forget his pledge, and, when Garrity observed a sensible slowing of speed, he rose from his seat, gripsack in hand, walked to the rear platform, stood on the lower steps, and awaited his opportunity.

He saw the yellow light of the station, but, so far as its dim rays revealed, no one was visible on or about it. Indeed, as has been said, the Ardvale "depot" might count itself lucky if twenty persons a week paid it a visit.

By and by, the long narrow platform appeared

at the side of the train, and he leaped off at the right time. The speed of the Express was so moderate that he had to take only three or four quick paces before coming to a standstill without harm or jar.

Engineer Ledwith's head was out of the cab, and he was looking backward, on the watch for his friend. When he discerned his form on the platform, and saw he was all right, he gave the throttle-lever a twitch. Instantly, the puffs from the engine came faster and faster, and 76 leaped forward, like a charger at the touch of the spur, sending a jolt from one end of the train to the other. So vigorous was the action that when the rear car whisked past its speed was almost doubled and had the disembarking passenger wished to board it again, he could not have done so.

He walked to the further end of the platform, where he waited until the red light on the last car swept out of sight around the long curve beyond. Then he looked here and there with the manner of a man resolved to find out whether or not he was observed by any one about the station.

The operator who had taken the place of Ashland a short time before was at his post within the little building, and promptly telegraphed in both directions that the Express had just passed, but, though he may have noticed that it was running slowly, he attached no importance to the fact. He saw nothing of the solitary passenger who had

leaped upon the platform, while the rumble of the train drowned whatever noise his feet may have made.

Garrity was pleased with the survey. Through the window of the station, he could see the side of the operator as he bent over his instrument, but not another person was visible in any direction.

"I am alone," he muttered with a smile; "no one beside me left the train."

But how easy it is to be mistaken!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FELLOW-TRAVELERS.

Of a truth, indeed, nothing in this world is easier than to be mistaken.

Isaac Garrity, having satisfied himself that he was the only person who left the Express, when it slowed up at Ardvale, was much pleased thereat, for he wished it thus.

He had told President Ketcham he wished to be absent for the night, to go to the bedside of a sick friend, but all the friends he had were never better in their lives than on that same evening.

Having completed his survey from the lower end of the platform, he stepped down on the ground, walked a short distance, until he reached the slightly traveled path, which he followed until it opened upon the regular highway, where the passing wagons were as few in number as the pedestrians.

As the reader has learned, it was one of the most lonely regions in the country, but Garrity acted as though he had either been there before or had fully informed himself of its topography. He

did not hesitate on arriving at the road, but turned to his right, which led him away from the station, and struck off at a rapid pace.

While walking, he unfastened his grip and took several articles therefrom, slowing his gait and finally coming to a halt, until he could adjust them as he wished. The moon being nearly overhead, its rays illuminated the middle of the road sufficiently for him to see a considerable way in either direction, and he continued his advance, with the precision of a man who is well aware where he is going.

The baggage car of the west bound Express on that same evening contained more than its usual quota of occupants. In the first place, there was the regular agent, Ezekiel Browne, whose little boy had so far recovered from his accident that he was pronounced out of danger. The father was happy in his thankfulness and went about his task with his old time vigor and promptness. To-night, however, he occasionally showed a trifle of nervousness in his manner, though he did not slight his duties in the least.

Arthur Helmuth was with him on the trip, it being the first since knocking off several days before, at the suggestion of President Ketcham. He was active, powerful, intelligent and attentive as ever, giving such ready help at the stations and on the route that Browne laughingly told him he was doing more than his share of the work.

He had taken the train for New Center, donned his working suit, and was so busy about the platform that it is doubtful whether a single passenger, boarding the train at that point, failed to see the good-natured and industrious young man.

From what has been hinted, the reader is likely to conclude that the youth had become convinced of the uselessness of his efforts to unravel the mystery of the duplicate check, and the bank burglary at New Center, and had voluntarily returned to work. Such, however, was far from the fact.

Over in the corner, perched on the biggest trunk in the car, and smoking his inevitable brierwood pipe, was Dolph Ashland, the effeminate telegraph operator, who was one of the heroes of the capture of the escaped convicts, French Dick and Shorty Wales, assisted thereto by robust Ben Averill, sheriff of the county. Dolph had assumed the easiest posture, and, between puffs of his pipe, when the noise of the train did not make talking too difficult, he indulged in some of his observations on matters in general, varied now and then by expressions about the business on which he and his companions, with the exception of Browne, were engaged.

The fourth occupant of the car was a keen-eyed man, rather below the medium size, but made up of bone and sinew. His massive shoulders, deep chest and finely formed limbs showed that he was not only immensely powerful, but possessed of a

panther-like agility. He was attired in a business suit of gray, and instead of sitting on one of the trunks, as did his companions, all or a part of the time, he leaned against the side of the car, looking absently through the front window where he could see the tender and engine, without being observed by Tom Ledwith or his fireman, his position being too far back to admit of that.

This individual had taken his place in the smoker at New Centre, where Dolph Ashland was also sitting. They where several seats apart, and acted as though they had never met before. Just after the train started, Ashland passed through the front of the smoker, and, giving a peculiar knock on the rear door of the baggage car, was immediately admitted. It was so improbable that any one would view such an insignificant-looking person with suspicion, that the telegraphist acted upon the theory, and made the change of quarters without any attempt at concealment.

It was different with the man in gray. He remained in the car until he had taken "the measure" of every occupant. Then, instead of going directly forward as Ashland had done, he went back, as if to enter the following car. He paused, however, on the platform, between the two, and, just before the train came to a halt for Three Bridges, leaped down on the side furthest from the platform, ran quickly forward, and was admitted into the baggage car by Arthur Helmuth who was

expecting him. The side door was slid back, and, reaching down his hand, the youth gave him such a powerful lift, that he came into the apartment on the bound as may be said.

To some, knowing the full meaning of the strategy, it would have seemed childish, but it accomplished its purpose. The only persons on the Express who knew of this man's presence in the baggage car were his three companions.

Five miles beyond Three Bridges was Beavertown. Before and during the stop, Ashland and the last arrival took care to keep back in the car, where no one at the station could see them. Arthur, however, was as conspicuously active as before, moving about the platform with much more noise and bustle than usual.

He sprang aboard as the train moved off, and gave a significant look at Ashland and his friend as the door was closed.

"*He's there*," he said, when it was safe to talk.

"Is he alone?" asked the man in gray.

"I observed no one with him."

"What luggage has he?"

"A hand bag only."

"Why didn't you get him to check it?" asked Ashland.

"I'm out of duplicate checks," laughed Arthur.

"He may have some friends with him," suggested the elder gentleman, who showed little inclination to jest.

"I think not," replied Arthur, "though of course I can't be certain."

As an evidence of the secrecy with which the three friends were moving, it may be said that Tom Ledwith, the engineer, was unaware that he was to slow up for any one beside Garrity, the young man in whom the party in the baggage car were interested. But, on the other hand, since the three intended to leave the train at whatever point Garrity disembarked, it was not necessary to tell Tom their wishes.

Wherever the president's private secretary landed was their destination, and though they suspected he was going to Ardvale, they were not certain, for he used a pass, as has been explained, and even had he bought a ticket it would have been no proof of his objective point.

When, however, Ledwith began slacking his speed for Ardvale, there could be no mistake as to its meaning. Ashland rose from the trunk on which he had been sitting so long, shook the ashes from his pipe, and carefully shoved it away in his pocket. Arthur had already removed his working suit, and was in his street attire, while the man in gray straightened up and looked keenly at them.

"Are your pistols all right?"

Each youth placed his hand to his hip and nodded his head.

"We can't all jump together," added the elder; "who shall go first?"

"I am more accustomed to it than you, and will take the first jump; you come right after me, and Ashland last."

"What kind of a landing place is there?" asked the man in gray.

"Pretty fair; Ashland and I are so used to leaping from moving trains there is no fear about us, but you will allow me——"

"I have done more of that business than you suspect," interrupted the man with a grim smile. "If any mishap occurs it won't be to *me*."

"I'm glad to know that," replied Arthur, sliding the outer door back and making ready.

Since he was to jump first, it was necessary to do so eastward of the station, so that the others might have the best chance. He was obliged to make his leap, too, before the speed of the train was at the lowest point.

But he had no fear. He knew the location of the platform on the opposite side so well that he made the jump at the very point intended. He landed lightly, ran a few paces, caught his foot in a vine, narrowly saved himself from falling, and then came to a stop as cleverly as he did the year before when following French Dick and Shorty Wales, under somewhat similar conditions.

There was enough light to see how his friends made out. The elder quickly followed, and he could not have done better had the train come to

a standstill. He took only two or three steps before stopping, and did not stumble at all.

Ashland sailed from the side door the next instant, but at the very moment of doing so, the engineer put on steam, and he was seen to fall and lie still.

Arthur and his friend were immediately after him, crouching low as the train shot past, to escape the eyes of Garrity.

"Are you hurt?" asked Arthur, bending over him.

"Hurt? No, but being down, I thought I might as well stay till it's safe to rise. I am awfully worried about one thing, though."

"What's that?" asked the man in alarm.

"I'm afraid I've smashed that pipe of mine."

CHAPTER XXXV.

ON THE ROAD.

"HUMPH!" muttered the man in disgust; "it would serve you right if you had received a good knock."

All three were on the ground, where the position was the best for observation. The train having passed the station, they found themselves a short distance above the little building with the yellow light suspended over the platform. The figure of Garrity was easily perceived as he walked slowly to the lower end, where, as already stated, he stood a minute or two taking observations before starting over the short path to the highway.

"Sh! don't stir yet," whispered the elder, laying his hand on Arthur's shoulder, who had partly risen to his feet.

"He may get away from us."

"No, he won't; I know the course he will take."

He forced the youths to remain where they were until a minute or two after Garrity had disappeared. They did not wish Hunter, the station agent, to

see them, and, instead of stepping upon the platform, moved along the tracks in a crouching posture until the lower end was reached, when they became more erect, the man taking the lead, with Arthur next and Ashland almost upon his heels.

The leader proved his acquaintance with the place by stepping at once into the path, along which he walked silently until they struck the rarely traveled highway.

Here a momentary halt was made, for a critical point in the business had been reached.

"If he is suspicious, there will be trouble," said the leader, cautiously; "I shall be lucky if he doesn't catch sight of me, for a great deal of risk must be run. Now, if he sees me alone, I can manage it without trouble."

"How?" asked Arthur.

"He doesn't know me, but he will recognize both of you; I will, therefore, keep so far in advance that if he discovers me, he will not notice you; if I am seen, I will walk straight on and play the belated and half tipsy farmer on his way home from some drinking bout at a relative's."

"No doubt that's the easiest and most natural character for you," remarked Ashland.

Without noticing the innuendo, the man continued:

"The moment I find he has seen me, I will break out into singing, which you will take as a signal

that you must keep back until I get the chance to join you."

"But, Abe, we may think you are crying. It's important that that should be understood," persisted Ashland, with the same gravity as before. Arthur could not help smiling, and pinched the arm of his companion as a caution not to presume too far on the patience of their friend, who was deeply in earnest.

"You will remain far enough to the rear as to hold me in sight, but will not strive to shorten the distance. If you notice that I have stopped, do the same. These directions are simple; are they comprehended?"

"We can make no mistake about them," replied Arthur.

"All right, then."

The youths waited with their eyes on their leader, whom the moonlight showed plainly, as he strode down the highway, both sides of which were lined with dense forest. Had he moved to the right or left, he would have disappeared under the dense shadows, but the road had so little travel over it, that there were no paths on either side, the pedestrians invariably keeping in the middle.

The leading pursuer, therefore, had good reason for believing the man in front of him would do the same.

It will be perceived that the only difficult task fell to the lot of the gentleman in gray, for if

Garrity should discover him before being seen himself, it would be quite easy for him to turn the tables. He had only to step out of the road among the trees, where he would not only be invisible, but could watch the movements of his pursuer at his leisure.

With such a delicate task before him, the man felt no call to give any heed to the youths behind him. They had simply to follow his directions, and despite the waggishness of Ashland, he was confident the fellow would make no blunder that could be avoided.

The man was uneasy. He had been in this part of the country and made his observations with the skill of an expert. He had decided in his mind the destination of Garrity, but after all, it was conjecture, and, should it prove wrong, the whole enterprise was almost sure to miscarry, when on the very eve of success.

His first aim was to obtain sight of Garrity, for it was not yet certain he was traveling along the road in the same direction with him. He therefore walked so fast that before Arthur and Ashland suspected, he was on the outer verge of their vision. But they readily quickened their own pace, and brought him in plainer sight.

Ashland had placed himself alongside his friend, for there was no call to travel in Indian file, when the detection of both would do no more harm than the discovery of one.

"It seems to me," said Arthur, who found the walking quite rough, "that the only danger we have to avoid is that of getting too close to him. If we lose him, it will be a small matter, since we can readily find each other as soon as necessary, but if we get so close that Garrity discovers us at the same time he sees him, the whole business will be spoiled."

"As long as we keep this far to the rear, that can't take place, for it is all we can do to see the old fellow now."

Such was the fact. Looking intently ahead, they sometimes failed to discern any person at all, and then, quickening their pace, observed only a shadowy form that appeared to be flickering and unsubstantial, and on the point of vanishing altogether.

"We shan't be able to tell whether he is standing still until the distance between us is considerably lessened."

"I dread one thing," remarked Ashland.

"What's that?"

"Abe may take it into his head to burst forth into song."

"Yes; it will be a bad sign."

"It isn't that, but—did you ever hear him sing?" inquired Dolph, suddenly.

"Certainly not; have you?"

"No; but I've heard him *try*. If he undertakes

it again, I shall turn and run, and you'll feel like it, too."

"I am afraid, Ashland, you will anger him by your continual jesting when he is so dead in earnest."

"Ah, I've known Abe a good many years, and I don't think anything could ever make him mad at me—but look! it strikes me he is in plainer sight now."

The two instantly halted, with their eyes on the form of their friend, who was certainly seen more distinctly than before. Obeying instructions, the youths waited for him to move forward before they should resume their pursuit of him.

"My gracious!" suddenly whispered Arthur; "he isn't standing still: *he's coming back!*"

Such was the fact, for the man was now in plain sight, and the motion of his body was noticeable.

This was a contingency unprovided for, and the couple were in doubt whether to hold their ground or also to fall back.

"We would better remain where we are," said Ashland with entire calmness.

"Why?"

"If he sees us running, it may start him to singing, and then we'll break our necks to get away."

Arthur and Dolph decided to stand still and await events.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A LIGHT AMONG THE TREES.

Of course the reader has identified the man who was acting the part of leader and guide for Arthur Helmuth and Dolph Ashland. He was the famous detective, Abram Cinch, who for the best of reasons selected those two young men as his companions on the delicate and dangerous enterprise in which he was now engaged.

The officer followed the plan laid down at first, when he took up the pursuit of the shadowy figure that had preceded him by only a few minutes along the lonely highway in the woods; he gave his whole attention to it, leaving the youths to look out for themselves and avoid mistakes, which, at this stage, were likely to prove fatal to the whole scheme.

While the detective knew that Garrity, the telegraph operator and private secretary of President Ketcham, had started up that road, he must remain uneasy until he gained sight of him. The three had leaped skillfully from the Express when it slowed up at the station, and were sure Garrity saw nothing of them.

But the fellow meant to run no risk. After walking a little way, what was to prevent his stopping in the shadows at the side of the road to wait and watch?

It was that which Detective Cinch feared. Great, therefore, was his relief, when, after walking a short distance, he observed the other advancing in the middle of the highway, just as he was doing himself. The pursuer instantly halted and allowed the man to move on until the view of him was dim and shadowy to the verge of invisibility; then he resumed his pursuit.

The difficulty of the officer's work will be seen. Since he could see Garrity, it followed that the latter had only to look behind him to see his pursuer; and, furthermore, since he was taking every care against any such mishap, it would seem that nothing was more probable than that he would do that very thing.

The officer tried to walk among the trees at the side of the highway, but the first attempt proved it was out of the question. The moonlight could not penetrate the vegetation, and the undergrowth was so matted that he threshed along with such a racket that, had he not used great care in withdrawing, he would have been betrayed by the noise itself.

He must stay in the road, not allow his man to be lost, and avoid discovery by him. In all his varied experience he could not recall a harder task.

It was at such times that Detective Cinch took a few chances. He was morally certain where Garrity was going. It would not do to let him drift away, but he allowed him to get so far in advance that only now and then could a flickering glimpse be obtained of him. This was a reasonable assurance against detection by the one in front, unless he should come to a halt, and the officer walked into his circle of vision before he was aware.

It has been shown that Cinch was prepared for everything that seemed likely to take place. If he were noticed, he would keep on, confident of his ability to mislead the fellow and to avert any suspicion he might feel, but he dreaded such a meeting, nevertheless.

The road led straight through the woods for a fourth of a mile, when a space of a dozen acres in extent was reached where the trees had been cleared away and nothing but stumps left.

Here the moonlight was so unobstructed that the man was plainly seen, and Detective Cinch slackened his pace to avoid discovery. When Garrity was almost to the other side of the clearing, the officer moved forward, never looking to the rear to learn how Arthur and Dolph were making out.

The open space was crossed and the woods entered when the first shock came to the officer.

He was walking in his usual manner, his gaze

centered on the road in front, when the form of the man assumed such distinctness that he stopped, suspecting the fellow had done the same.

A few seconds showed him that, instead of merely halting, the other was coming back. This looked bad, and the officer wheeled and did likewise, going so fast that, as has been shown, the youths behind him were quick to note the fact.

Cinch hurried still more, and coming up to them, whispered:

"Among the trees at once! he's coming back!"

The order was obeyed without a word. Two or three paces carried them deep enough into the wood to be as well hidden as if a hundred yards from the road. They had naught to do but to keep still, though the perplexing question came into the mind of Arthur and Dolph: if Cinch learned that Garrity was taking the back track, what was to hinder Garrity from learning that a man was walking in front of him in the same direction? And if he saw the officer, his distrust must be excited on the instant.

There was no cause, however, for these fears, because of the good reason that the man returning had not seen the officer, whose quickness enabled him to whisk out of sight before his presence was suspected.

This might not have occurred had the man approaching been Isaac Garrity, but it was not.

Ashland was the first to make this discovery. A

moment before he was opposite the three, the young telegraphist whispered:

"That isn't Garrity!"

The interesting question instantly arose. Who was he? Cinch's first thought was that he was a confederate, who was coming back to learn whether the coast was clear, but a careful study of the stranger, who passed near them, led all three to the same conclusion: he was a harmless countryman, plodding to his own home or a neighbor's, and without any thought of the business that had brought the little party such a distance.

It would have been easy for any intelligent person to assume such a part, but it was not the case in the present instance. To make sure, Cinch followed a short way, when, convinced he was right, he turned and hastened back, afraid of losing the other man.

He did not linger to exchange a word with the youths, who were presumed to know their business, but hastened on so rapidly that he would have been lost to sight had they not quickened their own pace.

It was a striking evidence of the loneliness of the section near Ardvale, that after walking fully a third of a mile, not the first glimpse of a dwelling was obtained. Ashland had just expressed the belief that they were the first white men to enter that solitude, and that they had the right to claim

it should be named for them, when Arthur whispered:

"Something is up."

"There's a light," added Ashland, whose vision was remarkably clear.

He pointed ahead, and a little to one side, where his companion observed a star-like twinkle among the trees. It was so slight and faint that it would not have been seen by any one not on the lookout for something of the kind.

They decided to wait where they were, convinced that Cinch could not have failed to notice the significant sign. They were right, for a few minutes later he joined them.

"Well," said he without trying to hide his pleasure; "I believe we have run them to ground at last."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Arthur.

"As sure as man can be of anything; I knew of that little house there, and decided that it was where the meeting would take place to-night, but I could not be certain till after what I have just seen."

"What's that?"

"When I found we were close to the spot, I used all the care I could and nature gave me a lift. You will observe that the road has so changed its course after passing through the clearing, that a ribbon of shadow is thrown along the right side. It is narrow, but it helped me to keep myself out

of sight, while Garrity, not noticing it, stayed in the middle of the highway. Then, through his own forgetfulness he played into my hand.

"That house is an old hunter's cabin, standing hardly a hundred feet from the road, with a path, overgrown with bushes, leading to it. Garrity seemed to recognize the place, but before turning into it, he stopped, as if he suspected interlopers might be near. He stood only a few minutes, when, satisfied that everything was right, he turned into the path."

"Did you follow him?" asked Arthur.

"No; I came back; that light proves the others are there, and that in the face of all our misgivings, we have been on the right trail from the beginning."

"It looks so," replied Arthur, "but there are so many curious things mixed up with this business that I am sure a disappointment awaits us."

"That's because you haven't had any experience in this line; your feelings come from your natural nervousness and amount to nothing; I don't let my confidence run away with me, but I never had more than I possess this minute that we are on the eve of the solution of the bank burglary and duplicate check business."

"Abe, it will hardly do for me to light my pipe, will it?" asked Ashland so seriously that the detective turned upon him in disgust.

"If I believed you were in earnest, I would be tempted to give you a kicking."

"But I haven't had a smoke since leaving the train; however I'll forgive you," he added resignedly, "and am ready to furnish you counsel as to the best way of running this campaign. In the first place, don't you think they have sentinels on watch?"

"It is not likely, for they are warranted in believing there is no need of anything of the kind; but we'll not forget that it is possible, and now let us understand each other, for no mistakes must be made at this point."

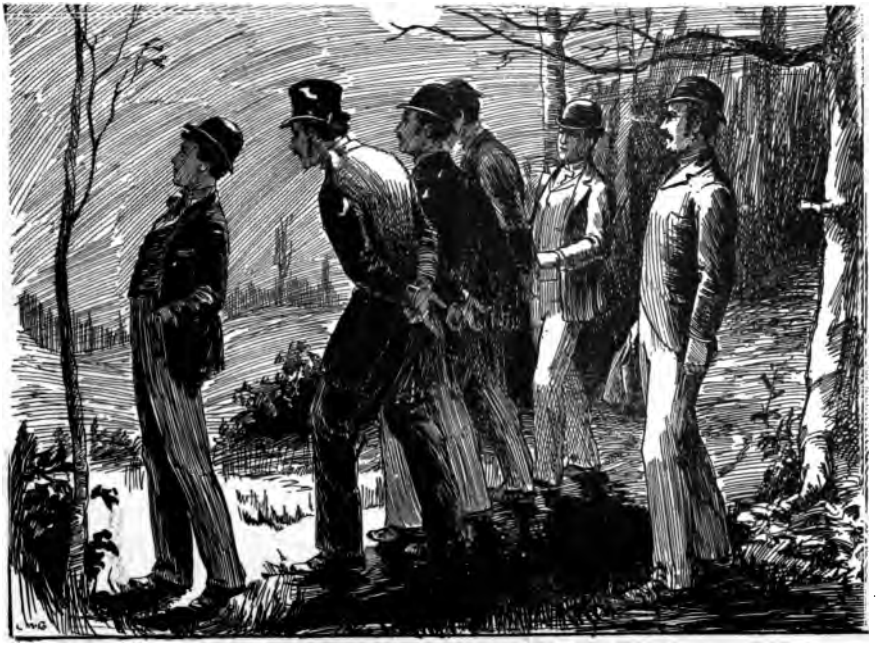
CHAPTER XXXVII.

GATHERED IN.

DETECTIVE CINCH had done his work so thoroughly on his previous visit to this section that he knew all the approaches to the cabin where he was convinced the conspirators were gathered together. As he had stated, the structure was composed of logs, and had been occupied by some hunter years before. It was in a fair condition, though unoccupied. There was but the single large room below, where were only enough remnants of the primitive furniture to answer the purpose for which the criminals used it. In fact, one of them had spent some time making preparations for this "auspicious occasion."

It was decided that the three should approach the building from as many different directions, so that in case of attempted flight, the rogues would have less chance of escape. There being woods on every hand, the deep shadows were greatly in favor of such an approach undiscovered.

Detective Cinch was to advance to the front door, while each of his friends did the same from either side, where the battered windows gave them



THE CAPTIVES WERE DRIVEN ALONG THE PATH TO THE HIGHWAY.

a view of the interior. The lead of course was taken by the officer in all things.

After the separation took place, Ashland reflected that the dog question had not been considered. It seemed so unreasonable that these men would leave themselves open to insidious approach, that he could not believe no precaution had been taken. While it was not likely that one of their number could be spared to act as sentinel, a savage canine was the very creature to serve them.

Ashland had a terror of dogs at night, but he took some comfort in the theory that if the animal was on duty, it would be at the front, where the officer must stumble over him.

But there was neither man nor dog on guard. After taking the precautions they did, those inside might well feel warranted in believing they were safe from molestation.

It may have been that Ashland had less obstruction in his path, for he was the first to obtain a view of the interior, though Arthur and the officer were but a moment behind him.

In the middle of the lower room of the cabin was a stand or small table, around which sat three men talking in low tones. All were smoking, but the spectators were struck by two facts: not a drop of liquor nor money was in sight. They resembled a number of gentlemen, who, on this pleasant night in autumn, had sat down at the table for a social smoke and chat.

The illumination of the room was furnished by an oil lamp standing on the table, which was another evidence that preparation had been made for the meeting. There was no fire in the room and no furniture in sight, except the three stools supporting the inmates. The floor was so broken that the natural query was how the party expected to spend the night, for the rude dwelling must have been anything but comfortable.

But the three pairs of eyes which stealthily peeped through the windows were more interested in the individuals at the table than in anything else.

One was about the size of Detective Cinch, though not so compactly built. Rather curiously, he wore a gray business suit similar to his, and was in the act of striking a match for his cigar when first observed by the eavesdroppers.

There was a remarkable resemblance between the other two, both having dark hair, mustache and side whiskers, while they were as neatly dressed as a couple of dry goods clerks.

And yet one of them was known to be Isaac Garrity, who had a smooth-shaven face. It followed, therefore, that on his way to this point, he had assumed the disguise, through which he was readily identified by the outsiders, now that he, like his companions, had removed his hat.

The first words recognized were uttered by the man in gray clothing, whose tones, although low, were readily heard in the profound stillness.

"Ackerman took his share with him to New York, but I haven't heard anything from him since."

"No doubt he's all right," replied the other stranger, to which remark Garrity added the comment:

"He has had enough experience to take care of himself. Then all that remains is to divide what's left."

"That's what I have done; I have it here in three equal parts—twenty-five thousand in each—but we ain't out of the woods yet."

"I think," said Garrity with a laugh which showed his white teeth, "that just now we are pretty well *in* the woods."

"What I mean is that we must take mighty good care or we shall be tripped; I'm afraid that one of Blackerton's best men has been nosing round the country for the last few days."

"I know he has," said Garrity, emphatically.

"It will be easy enough for *you*, since you can go straight back to work, and no one will be the wiser, but Hartz and I must get out of the country by different routes. Hurvan is only ten miles off, and I think we had better hire one of the settlers round here to drive us there; then we can take different trains home."

"A good idea," commented Garrity.

"Hasn't the president suspected anything from your being absent so often, Garrity?"

"He is the most guileless fellow in the world; I don't believe he would mistrust me even after I made a confession; the only fellow about the place that he don't like is that young fool of an Ashland and he has discharged him."

"Well, boys, we have made a pretty good strike——"

At that instant, the outer door was dashed inward as if by a battering ram, and Abram Cinch, Arthur Helmuth and Adolph Ashland bounded into the apartment, seemingly carried thither on the same projectile, which almost swept the door off its hinges.

"*If one of you stirs, he is a dead man!*"

It was the detective who uttered the threat which was backed by his leveled revolver, while the youths, equally cool, held their weapons at the same dead level.

"Gentlemen, there ain't any use of denying a thing after it is proven on you, as the deacon remarked when caught in an awful yarn," said Ashland, "and the only way to prevent our pulling the triggers of these playthings is to do as my respected friend and co-laborer suggests."

This observation of the young man was not down on the programme, but no one could interpose an objection.

The three rogues thus caught possessed weapons, but never dreaming they would be needed, had

them in their pockets. Any effort to draw them would be instantly fatal and they knew it.

Never were a party of wrongdoers more fairly caught. They were utterly helpless.

"Keep them covered," added the detective to his friends, who did as requested, "and at the first move, let them have it!"

He stepped briskly forward, and a prestidigitateur could not have performed a trick more deftly than he slipped the handcuffs on the three pairs of wrists. It seemed to the youths that he merely bent over, when there followed a quick succession of clicks, and the malefactors were fast.

As yet not one of them had uttered a word. Doubtless they felt they could not do justice to the occasion.

"Now, boys, you can put up your guns," said Cinch, "for they can't hurt anybody. Stand up!"

There was some muttering, but no one dared disregard the command of the officer whose flashing eye attested his deadly earnestness. They rose and he pushed them away from the little table. Then stooping down, he drew out a large green baize bag, looped at the top with a string. A hasty examination showed that within this receptacle were three fourths of the one hundred thousand dollars stolen from the bank at New Center.

Detective Cinch knew where the other fourth was, before it was referred to by one of the criminals. However, he made an examination of

the room, but found nothing more in the form of plunder.

"Now we'll march," he said, addressing the prisoners.

The door was still open, and his gestures showed that he meant them to pass through it. They held back a moment and seemed to be meditating resistance, but it was nipped in the bud by a kick, delivered with such vigor that the man in gray was actually driven through the entrance with such force that he narrowly missed falling on his face. The officer turned to aid the others in the same way, but they passed out so quickly that he was deprived of the pretext for such heroic treatment of them.

The proceedings were simple. The captives were driven along the path to the highway and compelled to turn in the direction of the Ardvale station. They moved together, sullen and ugly, while their captors kept beside and behind them so close that no attempt to dart to the right and left among the trees could succeed.

No doubt each one, as he plodded along, revolved in his mind some desperate plan of regaining his liberty, but none presented itself. They were completely surprised in the old cabin, and the man who did it was too shrewd to give them any chance to help themselves.

Detective Cinch carried the green baize bag with its valuable contents, and was so pleased with his

success that, when Ashland asked whether he had any prejudice against his smoking, he told him to puff to his heart's content.

"I don't suppose it is necessary to ask these gentlemen whether the odor of tobacco is disagreeable, since every one of them is rank with it."

Meanwhile, operator Hunter at the Ardvale station was undergoing a season of mild surprise, increasing to astonishment, as the facts gradually expanded upon him.

It was about fifteen minutes after the passage of the Express, and he was beginning to get business into shape to permit him to retire to his bunk, when a dispatch reached him from President Ketcham at Beavertown. It was to the effect that an engine and a single car was due at Ardvale within a half hour. It had followed the Express from Beavertown, its schedule being so arranged that it was to proceed at a moderate speed and maintain a safe distance at the rear.

"What can it be coming here for?" was the natural query of the operator; "I wonder whether its a special to take me down to New Center to assume charge of business."

But this was a private joke of Hunter, who knew that no such good fortune awaited him.

The next information was to the effect that the special would wait at Ardvale for some passengers.

"That beats the bugs!" exclaimed the operator; "there have been only three passengers to get on

here for the last four days, but there must have been a boom in travel to require special trains for them."

As the time drew near for the arrival of the engine and car, Hunter left his instrument and passed out on the platform. He had to wait only a few minutes, when he discerned the gleam of a red light to the eastward. The engine had shifted at Durmore, so as to back the rest of the way to Ardvale, where there was no turn table. This compelled the special to reverse for a distance of ten miles, but made matters right for the run to Beavertown.

The operator showed the white light, in reply to the whistle of the engine and was attentively watching the careful approach of the train, when he heard a sound of feet on the platform. Turning about he saw a striking sight. There were three men in charge of the same number of prisoners.

When the agent recognized Arthur and Ashland, and received an explanation from them, everything was plain. He opened his eyes in amazement, and, as he reflected on the handsome reward awaiting the capture of the criminals, sighed that it had not been his fortune to be a member of the party.

It was fortunate that the special arrived almost at the same time with the passengers, for a trying delay was thus averted.

The party lost no time in taking their seats in the car, and Hunter informed the engineer that

the road was clear to Beavertown. The twenty-two miles was made in twenty-six minutes; and, since there could be no question that three of the party were on the straight road to the penitentiary, it is fair to say they were "railroaded" thither.

Hunter telegraphed what had taken place to Beavertown, where officers were waiting. Within the following fifteen minutes the prisoners were securely under lock and key, while three-fourths of the money taken from the New Center bank was restored on the following day to the vaults of that institution.

The criminals received long terms of imprisonment, that of Garrity being shortened because of the valuable testimony he furnished.

Roorback Johnson, although possessing no legal or moral claim to a share in the large reward, received a liberal present from Arthur on condition that he went to work at once, and continued at steady employment, broken only by a week devoted to his honeymoon trip with his bride, *nee* Miss Scruggs. Jared Wonzell was so incensed at young Helmuth for failing to avail himself of his offer, that he resolutely refused to recognize him when they met on the street.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

"THERE is more than one occurrence, in recalling the particulars of the bank robbery, that I confess I do not fully understand."

The remark was made by Mr. Ketcham, president of the H. & N. C. Railway, while sitting in the library of his residence in Beavertown, holding conversation with Abram Cinch, the famous Blackerton detective. The gentlemen were smoking their fragrant cigars, and the wealthy railroad magnate was in his dressing-gown and slippers, with all his surroundings betokening taste and refinement.

"The case has some peculiar features," replied the officer, lolling back in his easy chair, "but it seems to me they are capable of explanation."

"The first that occurs to me is the action of the bank robbers who, you say, were experts."

"All were, with the exception of Garrity, your private secretary."

"Why did they enter the bank in broad daylight in the boldest manner conceivable?"

"I think the fact that they succeeded," said the detective with a smile, "is the best answer to that

question. It was so audacious, that, like some of the recent exploits out West, no one anticipated such a thing would be attempted, and they were unprepared for it; consequently it was the very course to succeed."

"Admitting that, why was the scamp who did the principal work—I mean the one who beat the cashier so badly that it will be a long time before he recovers and who stowed away the funds—why was not he masked like the others?"

"What need, when he was disguised just as effectually? He wanted the clerks to see him clearly, so that when they found themselves called upon to identify a man without any beard and as bald as a billiard ball, they would swear he was anybody else rather than Hank Hartz, one of the most dangerous criminals in America."

"I do not question your theory, though it strikes me as none the less odd on that account, but the two trunks——"

"There were four men concerned; Hartz, Ackerman, Belknap and Garrity. All, with the exception of your man, are old hands. Garrity is bad, clean through, and the reason he hasn't dipped deep in any great villainy before this, so far as we know, is because he hadn't the opportunity. His visits to New York, which he has been in the habit of making as often as he could, were marked by every form of vicious dissipation. His skill in penmanship and telegraphy, as well as a certain winsome-

ness of address, were noticed by those whose company he sought and led to the formation of the scheme to rob the New Center Bank."

"Why was he—a verdant hand—valuable to *them*, in an enterprise of that kind?"

"Mainly because of his position under you. Through you he possessed valuable secrets about the bank in which you are director, and was so placed that he could keep them informed over the telegraph, without awakening the suspicion of any one. Then, too, Garrity showed his nerve by going directly into the bank with the masked party. He took big risks, though he knew, unless caught in the act, as may be said, the finger of suspicion would never be pointed at him."

"But the trunk business—what about *that?*"

Detective Cinch smiled, relit his cigar and replied:

"That certainly is the most puzzling part of the affair, and is principally to be explained by the fact that Hartz, the leader, is known by the authorities as a sort of crank. In carrying out his bold operations, he indulges at times in whims which no other professional would attempt; but his great ability and his many successes caused his associates to defer to him where they would disregard the wishes of others.

"It was his scheme throughout. He caused two similar trunks to be brought to New Center, and it was Ackerman who had one of them checked to

Beavertown, while the other was taken in the carriage to the rear of the bank and finally into the bank itself. The green baize bag was also a part of the outfit and lay within the trunk. The money was inside the bag in the trunk, when the party left the bank in such haste. Hartz and Belknap rode out in the country, but when they reached a safe point, the trunk was thrown away, where there was no danger of it being found. The money stayed in the green baize bag?"

"And the other trunk?"

"That, as I said, was checked to Beavertown by Ackerman, but it was the disguised Garrity who claimed it and who drove out to the Big Woods with it."

"But he had a companion—who was he?"

"Jerry Bilkins, the hackman. Unfortunately, those who saw the proceeding—and I believe the negro Roorback Johnson was really the only one—did not gain a sight of Bilkins's face, else the mystery might have been solved much more readily. Bilkins did not recognize Garrity, who paid him such a liberal fee that he never betrayed him, mainly because he was made to believe that if he did so, he would not only be punished, but could not earn any part of the large reward."

"Who was the man that rode beyond Beavertown, under the pretense of having fallen asleep and presented the right check to Arthur Helmuth?"

"Ackerman, he was wise enough, however, to see the danger he was running into, and he left the train at Durmore, in time to escape arrest."

"It strikes me that all these performances were only so much tomfoolery unwarranted by the risk involved."

"The main purpose, as I make it, was to keep attention away from the trunk containing the baize bag with the plunder until that was secure, though members of the gang certainly were rash more than once to an extent for which there was no call; but you must remember that the main crime was of that nature, and the minor incidents were fit accompaniments. When the road looked clear, Hartz took the train in open day to Ardvale, where he made his way to the log cabin at the side of the highway and hid the plunder there."

"But what of Ackerman?"

"He was so anxious to get back to New York that he was given his share, but he had hardly reached the city when he was snapped up by the inspector's men, and what was altogether unexpected, he squealed, as we say, and gave points which afforded me great help in my task. You know very nearly every dollar he had was recovered from him, so that the bank has lost comparatively little."

"But the duplicate check business?"

"I confess that bothered me, and I don't know whether I would have unraveled it but for the

help of Garrity. When that coward saw he was caught, he made haste to turn State's evidence in the hope that the courts would deal leniently with him. Garrity was at the bottom of *that.*"

"In what way?"

"For some weeks previous to the bank burglary, he was carefully working up a scheme for robbing your company of valuable baggage. He had a number of counterfeit trunk checks made—an easy thing to do—with the intention of notifying confederates when valuable luggage was *in transitu*, and furnishing duplicate checks with which to claim them. You understand the delicate nature of this business, for it was not possible at all times to furnish the necessary duplicate check. It needed some one on the inside, and Garrity's well known situation as your private secretary, gave him access everywhere on the property of your company. He tells me he had about a hundred counterfeit checks, which of course is only a small part of the number used along the road, though a large percentage of those employed between New Center to Beavertown. On his way westward, Ackerman, who was on the train, gave him the number of his check. Garrity had a corresponding one. In the gathering night at Beavertown, when his disguise caused him to resemble Ackerman, he presented the check to Helmuth and took the trunk away in the manner I have already described."

"Then for the time he disappeared."

"Yes; Ackerman rode some distance further, when he made his way to the baggage car, and presented what was really the genuine check for the trunk that had already been surrendered to another."

"What childishness!" exclaimed President Ketcham, impatiently.

"It is not altogether free from the charge, but you must not forget that, in the face of the declaration of one of your best citzens that he had seen a similar trunk—and no doubt the right one—carried in another direction, attention was so diverted by this shuttlecock business with the luggage traveling westward, that Hartz accomplished his purpose; he parried the search and took the money to the old building, where it remained hidden until it seemed safe for the criminals to meet and divide the booty."

"Why was it hidden near Ardvale?"

"Because there was no better place in the country in which to hide it."

"Had the escape of French Dick and Shorty Wales anything to do with the bank burglary?"

"Nothing; it was one of those coincidences which sometimes occur in this life. Had they not been recaptured so quickly, it would have been of great help to the real burglars, since the crime would have been laid at the door of the convicts."

"How came the telegraph wires to be cut between here and Beavertown?"

"Since Garrity knows nothing about that, it must

have been done by that scamp, Shorty Wales. He was doubtless planning some crime, possibly to rob the train, and he sought to shut off communication for awhile, until they could make their escape sure. This, however, is only supposition on my part, except so far as the act had nothing to do with the bank burglary. Probably they, too, shifted the Express to the wrong track out of pure deviltry."

"Cinch, are you aware that you rendered me exceedingly uncomfortable?"

"In what way?"

"I saw you were distrustful of Arthur Helmuth; you did not say so, but your manner showed it too plainly to be mistaken."

"You should hardly put it as strongly as that; I may say I was distrustful of every one; I was struck by the facilities Helmuth had for dipping into anything of that nature; then I saw he was unusually bright, and a great favorite of yours. I grew more distrustful, and began an investigation of my own. I made up as an innocent looking old fellow from the city, and sauntered out to Helmuth's house; when I got a glimpse of the trunk, you may be sure I was confirmed in my belief in his guilt, but the sentiment was not long with me, when it was dissipated by my interview with the African, Roorback Johnson, who told me the whole story, though he didn't mean to do so."

"You ought to have informed me at once, so as to relieve my distress."

"I might have done so, had I known anything of it. But Helmuth being eliminated, I set to work to find out the guilty ones, for I knew one of the confederates must be a man in the employ of the railway company. It was just then I learned that my nephew, Dolph Ashland, was the telegraph operator you had just brought from Ardvale."

"Of course you never suspected *him?*"

"Not for a moment; I have known him from his birth; he is one of the most brilliant fellows I ever met."

"Did you suspect Garrity at that time?"

"I was beginning to do so, mainly because of his nearness to you. I met my nephew secretly, and it did not take us long to form an understanding. We occasionally saw each other at the restaurant, near the station, when he went to his lunch, and managed to exchange what we wanted to say, though we acted as strangers, and once or twice seemed on the point of coming to blows."

"It was you who sent those telegrams referring to 'freight,' 'passenger,' etc., and signed 'Q. Z. Z.?'"

"It was I; I continually picked up little points strengthening the evidence of guilt against Garrity, and, with a view of making Ashland watch him more closely, I telegraphed him, always referring to the man in the office by the term agreed on,

which was 'freight.' Whenever that word passed between us, it meant President Ketcham's private secretary, and no one else. It would have been folly to mention him by name, since he was in the office, and watching Ashland. My nephew was keen enough to discover this very soon, and he advised me to send him no messages, unless actually necessary."

"Where were the criminals at this time?"

"I kept my eye on Hartz, so far as I could. He is well educated, and now and then he also resorted to the telegraph to reach Garrity. This was the best thing that could happen for us, since it gave Ashland a chance to play the spy on him. The fellow used a cipher, but that young fellow caught on like a flash. Indeed, that is one of his most striking accomplishments; he never saw any secret writing which he failed to unravel.

"You can understand," continued the detective, "how fate played into our hands. Ashland stuck to his duty closely, and there wasn't a cipher despatch that came over the wires to Garrity while Dolph was in the office which he did not take off and put on paper. Garrity reported the cipher telegrams which Dolph received to you, while Dolph reported what Garrity received to me.

"Not only that, but that young rascal did a daring thing one afternoon during the absence of his associate. A call came from New Center, which he recognized as from the sender of the

cipher telegrams, and he answered as if from Garrity—for it was he—to go ahead, and he did giving away some valuable points. It rankles in Garrity's breast that he should have been outwitted by the young fellow in the same room with him whom he did not like, but whom he never suspected of playing the part that he did."

"Well," said the president with a sigh, "I was shocked to learn how Garrity had violated my confidence in him. I was satisfied from you of his guilt when I sent Ashland off for a day or two to give him a chance to help you. Since you told me your company never accepted anything beyond your regular charges, I agreed with you that the proper thing to do was to arrange the business so that the reward should fall to two such deserving young men."

"I am glad we were able to do that, but, aside from our main object, I know of no persons whom I would have preferred above them when the time came to strike the blow. Ashland is wonderfully skillful with the pistol, and, though he possesses little physical strength, is as cool as a veteran, and is pluck clear through. The same can be said of Helmuth, except that he is very strong and active, and I believe would have mastered any single one of the gang without help. What are you going to do with Helmuth?"

"Next month I shall put him on the road as conductor of the morning accommodation train.

It is quite a jump for him, but he deserves it. As for Ashland, he shall be my private secretary with a liberal increase in his salary."

President Ketcham did not forget his promise, for Ashland was advanced at once to the situation named, while Helmuth speedily donned the uniform of conductor on the passenger line ; and that both proved worthy of the confidence reposed in them need not be said to any reader who has followed their fortunes through these chapters.

THE END.

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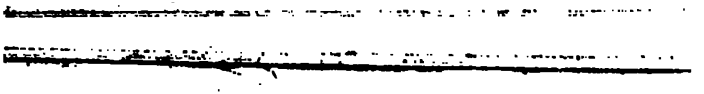
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